

Kill la Bill

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Kill la Bill

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Summary

"Kill Bill"-au.

Matoi Ryuko wakes from a coma four years after her jealous ex-lover, Kiryuin Satsuki, attempts to murder her on her wedding day.

Notes

For ease of reading, I'll be placing warnings here at the top for chapters to warn of sexual scenes.

My Baby Shot Me Down

Tunk- tunk- tunk-

CHAPTER 1: My Baby Shot Me Down

The sound of heels against splintered floorboards. Hollow and unnerving. The only noise left remaining aside from Ryuko's own pounding heart and labored breathing.

Tunk- tunk- shunk.

She could barely focus her vision past the rage. Ryuko was simultaneously thankful and terrified because of it. It meant that all she could see was the crisp contrast of the white suit above her and twin azure orbs as the figure knelt down.

"Do you find me sadistic?"

It should've been the opposite. Blood loss was supposed to make your vision blurry, not crisper. Ryuko didn't want to see the face looming above her. Didn't want to hear *her* voice.

"I would like to believe, Ryuko, that even now you are aware enough to know that there is nothing sadistic in my actions."

Pale fingers slipped into the gap between suit and breast, withdrawing a handkerchief from an inner pocket. She couldn't even feel the scrape of the linen cloth against her jaw, cheek, and chin. Only noticing the bloodied fabric when it was lifted into her eyesight. Ryuko grit her teeth at the name embroidered on its corner.

"No, Ryuko. At this moment, this is me at my most... masochistic."

Ryuko expected the shrill sound of a katana being drawn. Even craved it. But she watched as the figure elongated, reaching to their side to remove a finely polished revolver from a holster.

It's not theirs. Ryuko knows that. Knows it because she had left that revolver on a nightstand nearly eight hundred miles away. In a city she left behind. In a life she had hoped to forget. And she realized the emphasis behind it. The fitting metaphor, of two ends coming together as one, and Ryuko had never thought she'd be willing to beg for the blade in place of a bullet.

There's the faint click as the hammer is pulled back, the cylinder rotating counter-clockwise a single chamber. An index finger resting against the trigger; professional and relaxed. Ryuko speaks, her voice a jarring grate in the silence of the space between them.

"Satsuki," she said, not because she thought it would save her life but because she knew it had to be said before everything was done. "I'm your sis--"

BANG.

Twelve years earlier. Japan.

“Please accept our deepest sympathies.”

Ryuko bowed. The couple before her was replaced with a new set of people.

“Accept our apologies for your loss.”

Another bow. Another set of people. It had been that way for a few hours. Half an hour later a majority of the mourners were gone and Ryuko thoroughly regretted showing up to the event at all. Her head was pounding from holding herself back and as she relaxed, she hissed at the C-shaped blood marks in her palms.

How dare him, her jaw set itself and she could feel one of her canines digging into the flesh of her inner cheek. *How dare that bastard leave me like this*. The taste of blood filled her mouth.

She knew it was illogical to blame him. It didn’t add up, no matter which way the situation was angled. But despite that, she was still angry. Livid, even. Ryuko couldn’t believe that her own father had managed to get himself killed.

In his own home, at that.

It would have been one thing if she hadn’t had to witness the scene herself. Hadn’t had to wrench the oddly scissor-shaped blade from his chest. Hadn’t had to deal with the swell of blood that gushed from the wound. Hadn’t had to be the one to watch every last glint disappear from his one good eye.

But she did. That was what enraged her the most. Even in death, her father had managed to make all of his problems her own.

“Pardon the intrusion. Would you happen to be Matoi Ryuko?” Ryuko snapped her gaze up from her palms. Folding and hiding them against the silk fabric of her kimono.

Then she forgot to respond. Her mouth stuck at a position with her lips slightly parted. Despite knowing full well that she looked daft to the person in front of her, there was nothing Ryuko could do. Sentences and words and air- all of it was suddenly unnecessary.

“I suppose I should take your silence as confirmation?” a quirked half-grin. Barely enough to misalign any features on the woman’s angular face.

“Ah! Uh- yes! Apologies.” Ryuko bowed. A forced habit from the many she had endured for the sake of others most of the night.

“None needed, Matoi-san.” the woman responded. Her back elongating even more before she bent forward into an elegant bow.

“Ah, please!” Ryuko jumped forward. Forgetting her manners for long enough to nearly shove the woman back into an upright position.

The woman beat her to it, though, and caught Ryuko’s eye with a look between challenge and amusement. “I am here on behalf of my mother, Kiryuin Ragyo. She sends her deepest sympathies for your tragic loss, Matoi-san.”

“Thank you, erh-” she fumbled, half from not knowing the woman properly and the other from embarrassment.

“Forgive my rudeness. I am Kiryuin Satsuki. Sole heir of the Kiryuin name.” Ryuko nodded. Far too engrossed in the sheer sleekness of Satsuki’s looks. From her smooth and lengthy black hair to the impeccably fitted white suit with matching dress shoes. It took her all she had to stop staring.

“Kiryuin, huh?” Ryuko breathed. Trying to recall a time when she had ever heard the name. “I’m, uh. Not certain my father ever spoke of your family.”

“Hardly surprising.” Satsuki said, her lips curved perfectly and blue eyes focused solely on Ryuko’s. “With the nature of my mother’s business that is often the case.”

There was something in the way that Satsuki spoke that Ryuko knew she was being baited. It hadn’t been left as a dead end and Ryuko could feel a tingle at the nape of her neck as she willingly pressed onward. “And what sort of business *does* your mother run, Kiryuin-san?”

The room around them was devoid of people and Ryuko wasn’t certain when that possibly could have happened. It was too convenient.

Did she have that katana in her hand the entire time? Ryuko reached up, pressing her palm against the rippling sensation on her neck, only to find that it was motionless- cold and clammy. Satsuki was still smiling.

“My mother runs a business based solely on the exchange of time.” she watched as Satsuki’s fingers traced absentmindedly over the worn leather of the katana’s hilt. Her gaze never breaking from Ryuko’s. “In one word: assassination.”

Ryuko couldn’t help but let the faintest ‘hah’ slip from her mouth as she attempted to discreetly slide one of her feet back. “You don’t say.”

The response didn’t come in the form of words that time. Ryuko only remembered a moment. Them staring at each other across what seemed to be far too little space. And then the next, where her shoulder and wrist were straining to keep the katana’s blade from severing her head from her body. “You have decent reflexes, Matoi-san.”

“Thanks.” She managed from between gritted teeth. With the rest of the force she could well up, Ryuko pushed back against the blade, knocking it away. Then braced herself in a posture she hadn’t known she was capable of. The scissor blade she had pulled from her father’s body pointed threateningly at Satsuki.

Satsuki's eyes traced down the path of Ryuko's arms and up the length of the crimson blade in her hands before returning her katana to its sheath. "I expected no less from the daughter of Matoi Isshin. And neither did my mother."

Her arms were starting to shake. The adrenaline and energy she had used to block Satsuki's blow had left her feeling drained; defenseless. What's more, Satsuki seemed unperturbed. Not a bead of sweat on her brow from the single-handed blow she had delivered with astonishing force.

"Matoi-san..." and Satsuki's voice faded ever so slightly, her eyes glazing with concern as they finished scanning the blade in Ryuko's grip, "There is nothing left for you here."

By that time, Ryuko had begun to allow the weight of the sword to overcome her. Satsuki's words served only to remind her of the bitter truth. She had nothing left. No half-rate father. No home to go back too. No friends or family that wanted to care for her after the shame of her father's failures or her own troubled past.

"Come with me." Satsuki said. The words neither hollow nor full. "Fight for me. Hone your natural abilities into something that will change this world." she was close to Ryuko. Slim fingers helping her own to uncurl their grip from the scissor blade. "Make your own path. Your own destiny."

With what little energy she had left in her limbs, Ryuko snapped the blade with a flick of her wrist. Returning it to the size of a kitchen knife and slipping it into the space between her obi and kimono. When she looked back up, Satsuki had a boarding pass extended towards her between her index and middle finger.

"Are you ready to start a new life, Matoi-san?" Ryuko sighed. Not hesitating in her action to reach out and swipe the pass from Satsuki's hand.

"What can I say? I've always wanted to go to America."

Revenge Is A Dish Best Served Cold

CHAPTER 2: Revenge Is A Dish Best Served Cold

A house with a vibrant paint job. Front yard littered with toys. The sound of an ice cream truck playing down the street.

“Almost makes me wish I had stayed in that coma.” Ryuko groaned while removing the keys from the ignition of the vehicle. *“Almost.”*

Running a hand through her hair, she paused. Her fingers grazing against a spot on her skull where a metal plate sat just below the skin. In a belligerent show of compartmentalization she wrenched herself from the driver's seat. Refusing to think about it. There was only room for one thing on her mind and nothing was going to stand in her way. Not a horrendous paint job, not a load of toys, and not an obnoxious melody. *No*, Ryuko mused with her face set in a menacing grin, *I'm gonna have my just desserts.*

Using her entire fist, Ryuko slammed it against the doorbell. On the other side she could hear heavy footsteps approaching. “Mako, you’re home early from work-”

The entryway peeled open and Ryuko watched on in amusement as the lumbering form of Gamagoori Ira stood there; unmoving. It took all of a brief second for the look of confusion to leave his face.

And a second was all it took for Ryuko to reel her arm back and let go, striking Gamagoori right between the eyes.

“Hey there, Gamagoori.” Ryuko took the opportunity to punch him one more time, her knuckles connecting with his jaw. “Long time, no see.”

The blow sent him into the air. His body leveling out flat before coming down on top of a low coffee table with a sickening snap.

“I’ve got one question for you, Gamagoori.” Ryuko rolled her head, cracking her neck as she took a few steps towards his prone body. “Where’s Sats-”

Her sentence was cut short as one of Gamagoori’s massive hands reached out and seized her by the calf. She moved to stomp on his wrist with her free leg only to find herself being hurled into the living rooms glass shelving. It crumbled at the force, falling to the floor along with her form.

“Urgh, shi-” Gamagoori grabbed her by the neck, dragging her off the floor. Ryuko worked her jaw as she felt her toes miss the ground with every hectic kick of her legs. She clawed her nails into his meaty forearm, hoping to physically pry herself loose, panicking when his grip tightened. The sound of her neck muscles straining under the force worrying Ryuko more than the lack of air.

It was her last option. Ryuko dropped her hand, reaching as far down to her ankle as she could while maintaining eye contact with Gamagoori. The utter determination in his eyes matched the subsequent trench between his brows and Ryuko thought it impossible to smooth the thing out.

Until she buried her boot knife hilt deep in his elbow.

The shock of the action was enough to loosen his grip, allowing Ryuko to palm his wrist, forcing him to let go. She only paused for a second, ignoring the searing pain in her lungs as she kicked him square in the gut and sent him sprawling onto his back again. This time when Ryuko moved towards him, she made a point of standing atop his chest, withdrawing her knife from his arm and holding it against his neck.

As the dust settled around them, the faint sound of a door lock being flicked open could be heard. Ryuko didn't flinch, keeping her knife against Gamagoori's adam's apple while reaching to place her free palm against the pistol in the back of her pants. The entire time, Gamagoori's eyes flitted from Ryuko to the kitchen beside them.

"Ira! How many times do I have to tell you not to fight with Uzu in the house?!"

Ryuko twitched; her gaze shifting rapidly to the form of a familiar woman standing in the hallway beside her. "Mako?!"

"Ryuko! You're finally awake!" Mako paused her joy a moment, face scrunching up in realization. "Damnit! I lost the coma lotto!"

Before Ryuko could get a word in, two smaller figures darted into the area. Stopping a few short feet away from where Ryuko had Gamagoori knocked down.

"C'mon! Finish 'im!"

"He ain't worth the wait! Slit 'is throat!"

The noise of high pitched voices was stunning. Ryuko nearly relaxed her grip on the blade before settling her emotions back down. Uncaring of the children goading her into action.

"Everyone shut yer mouths!" she bellowed, effectively silencing the incessant chatter. "Now. I've got some fuckin' question. And I'm *demanding* fuckin' answers."

She glanced down in that moment. Aware that she had left herself open multiple times to Gamagoori. Only to find that his eyes were wide. A fine trickle of blood beginning to seep from a diminutive cut on his throat where she had leaned a bit too much against the blade. He looked absolutely terrified and Ryuko could only imagine that she had looked like that once. The thought left her stomach in knots.

"Mako." Ryuko said. Looking back up to spy Mako with her face alight in the warmest of smiles. "You and Gamagoori...?"

"Yup! Nearly four years ago!"

“And the kids...?”

“Ours!” Ryuko let out an audible groan. Her adrenaline high was beginning to wear off, causing the sound of her heart to throb in her skull.

“Ok. Hold on. Wait. What’s up with the coma lotto thing?” at her words, Mako reached into her purse to withdraw her phone. Her bob-cut hair swirling the circumference of her head with every move.

“Oh yea! Nonon decided to put a lotto out on the date you’d come out of your coma!” Ryuko bared her teeth in a confused sneer.

“What? Why would you guys do that? Wait-” Ryuko nearly pulled the blade away from Gamagoori’s throat as she waved her hand. “Who the hell won the lotto then?!”

Mako spent a few minutes flicking at her phone’s screen with an inquisitive index finger set at her mouth. “Mmmm... looks like Satsuki won.” Ryuko’s grip tightened on her knife.

“Doesn’t that just fuckin’ figure.” She growled the words.

“She does have that freaky intuition.” Mako chimed in before settling her eyes on the scene before her. “Oh, c’mon Ryuko! It’s been four years since you’ve seen me and you’re not even gonna give me a hug?!”

The space between her lungs constricted. Ryuko knew it was weak of her to let old emotions breach her concentration. She had come here for revenge. To kill one of the bastards that had aided in landing her in a coma and taking everything from her.

“I-” Ryuko started, swallowing back on her tongue as it swelled in her mouth.

She looked into Mako’s eyes and saw back a reflection of time that hadn’t occurred to her previously. Things had changed. She was the only one still left in a time that was gone.

“I guess.” The words were barely audible, and as Ryuko drew back from Gamagoori, she pointed the tip of the knife threateningly at him. He raised his palms up, waving them slightly in surrender.

“See? That’s better.” Mako flung forward at Ryuko as she stepped down from her perch atop Gamagoori. “Now Ira. Behave yourself! Ryuko is my friend and I’ll not have you harming her out of some sense of duty!”

“Yes, darling.” Ryuko snickered at the soft tone in Gamagoori’s booming voice as she was wrapped in a tight embrace.

“Welcome back, Ryuko.” Mako said and Ryuko instinctively held her tighter.

“Yea.” She pulled away. Smiling genuinely for the first time since she had escaped from the hospital. It was all teeth and Ryuko couldn’t remember what it was like to be angry in that moment.

It didn't last, though, and as she turned back towards Gamagoori, she fixed him with a glare that would've killed anyone of lesser fortitude. He awkwardly brushed flakes of glass from his shoulders. Refusing to acknowledge the look that Ryuko was pinning him with.

"Gamagoori." Ryuko spoke his name and the room felt far away. "Tell me where Satsuki is."

"I- I cannot do that!" his response wasn't what surprised Ryuko. It was the prompt and cordial bow that he fell into. "She is still my lady! And I cannot betray her, even if it means my life!"

Ryuko let out a breath between her teeth with a sharp tch. "Of course not." She traced the edge of the blade against the top of her boot before jamming it back into its sheath.

"But-" and Gamagoori rose from his bow as he spoke, "-that does not mean I condone my lady's actions."

Pausing, Ryuko considered his words. Hesitant to acknowledge him as anything more than a second-rate villain. Even as she attempted to grasp at the emotions that she had arrived with, she could feel them slipping through the cracks of her damaged soul.

"Go speak with Inumuta." Gamagoori rose, his posture once again stoic and unbent. "And thank you. Matoi Ryuko. I will always remember your mercy in this moment!"

"Hah," Ryuko pivoted ninety-degrees on her heel, bringing a hand to her head to scratch at an itch that had suddenly manifested on her scalp. "*Mercy*. Don't make me fuckin' laugh. Just be glad Mako was here."

She turned another ninety-degrees, her back turned to Gamagoori as she began to make her way towards the front door of their quaint home.

"Oh, and Gamagoori." Ryuko stopped; her hand against the frame of the entrance. "Do tell Satsuki that I'm just dying to see her."

Without missing a beat, Ryuko had traversed the short distance to her vehicle. The words "Pussy Wagon" painted in grotesque mixtures of bubblegum pink and yellow on the side. Then jammed the keys into the ignition and squealed away. Leaving behind a hundred miles of tire on the street.

A reminder for years to come.

Twelve years earlier. A month after arriving in America.

"For never having handled a firearm before you manage to be surprisingly precise."

"Hm." *Dump the clip. Slide the fresh one in. Click. Pull the slide back. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Dump the clip...*

“That should be enough for today.” Ryuko stopped. Her arms poised with the pistol pointed down the range at a paper target.

“You sure?” she questioned. Turning her head slightly to watch as Satsuki set down the button that changed the paper targets distance. She removed her earplugs before responding to Ryuko.

“Yes. There should be enough data collected at this point to ascertain your potential.” Satsuki was already turning to leave as Ryuko unloaded the clip.

“Speaking of which, I sorta had a question about that...” Ryuko had to jog her way up the stairs to catch up to where Satsuki was. She watched as someone appeared at Satsuki’s side, handing over the targets that Ryuko had been shooting at moments before. “I mean- you’ve told me what happens if I *do* pass the proficiency tests. But what happens if I don’t?”

Satsuki seemed to be paying her no mind. Far too engrossed with the sheet she was holding up. Ryuko waited as Satsuki slipped her pinky finger into a hole in the bullseye just barely big enough for it and hummed. “Does it matter to know?”

“It would give me a little peace of mind.” Ryuko mumbled while nearly crashing into Satsuki as she stopped abruptly.

“Then you should focus solely on passing.” It had been since the funeral that Ryuko last saw Satsuki vaguely smile and seeing it again in that moment made her heart nearly give out. Despite the foreboding words that Satsuki offered her. “You could say that the alternative would be rather unpleasant.”

“Ah.” Ryuko paused. Frozen in her spot as her stomach dropped at the realization. Satsuki seemed to ignore it, continuing down the lengthy hallway and not looking back.

“Your tests are done for today, so you may do as you wish.” Back to icy cold.

Ryuko stood in place until the sound of heels against marbled flooring had drifted off to nothingness.

Finally she decided that the last place she wanted to be was in the enormous manor that she had been confined to for weeks. With little formality she walked opposite from where Satsuki had disappeared to and out into the comforting breeze of a sunny afternoon.

Ryuko hadn’t expected them to end up in a mansion in an eccentric area of San Diego, California. Not that she had minded. The climate was comfortable nearly every day and the ocean within walking distance. She had never been given so many opportunities to enjoy sun and salt in her life.

Yet it was all rather lackluster. There was too much on her mind to thoroughly enjoy the extravagancy of it all.

Stepping into a cramped cafe, Ryuko ordered a coffee and sat down outside. Thankful that one of the few things her father had ever done for her was send her to cram schools for

learning English.

He probably knew this was going to happen. she thought to herself. Taking a sip of coffee and recoiling when she burned her tongue. *What an asshole.*

She didn't regret leaving Japan. Certainly didn't regret going with Satsuki to do so. It was just easier to blame the situation on a dead man than her own actions. Something Ryuko had always had a knack for doing. But what bothered her the most was that, now with him gone, it was up to her to decide what was best for herself. Something she had notoriously been awful at.

Not to mention that Satsuki has been rather distant as of late. Hell, this is the first time I've seen her in four days and we live in the same house! Ryuko scratched her neck, trying again for another careful sip at her coffee after dumping creamer into it. *What if she thinks I was a mistake? What if this entire thing falls through?*

She didn't really want to think about that and Satsuki's words from earlier had done little to comfort her. There was zero room for error, and Ryuko feared that she had already cast some doubt.

I'm just not good with rifles, ok?! she huffed. Startling a passerby who had neglected to wear earphones. *Or swords... but I'm at least decent with pistols. Though explosives...* Ryuko cringed at the memory. Flashes of vacating a smoking room and the sound of fire alarms going off filled her thoughts.

It had surprised her to what extent the Kiryuin's were willing to go through to prepare a person for the task of assassination. The first of many steps being the proficiency tests that Ryuko was enduring herself. Satsuki had explained that after they had determined Ryuko's specific skills, or whether she had none at all, then they would move onto the next step. Which Ryuko had finally determined was one of two options: training or death.

I really hope it isn't death for me... she hid her face in her hands. Suddenly desperate for a redo of the last few weeks.

"Ryuko!"

As soon as that voice crossed Ryuko's ears she let go of her coffee cup and braced her body for an inevitable impact. Taking the blow full force and sprawling out on the ground with an obnoxious weight on top of her.

"So this is where you've been!"

Ryuko groaned in response. Opening her eyes slightly only to connect gazes with a pair of hazel ones.

"Satsuki's been lookin' aaaaaall over for yah!"

She closed her eyes again, waiting for the spinning sensation from her head having connected with the concrete to fade. Reaching up, she squished the girl's round face between her palms.

“Didn’t your mom ever tell yah to not tackle people as a greeting, Mako?”

“Yep!” and that was the end of that conversation point. “Satsuki says that you should hurry back!”

“Satsuki-this, Satsuki-that. What’s so important that I can’t finish my cup of coffee before heading back?” sitting up, she let Mako stay cradled in her lap. Watching as the petite girl scratched at her scalp, mussing up her perpetually disheveled hair even more.

“She told me, to tell you, that your proficiency results are back.” Mako had gripped Ryuko’s shoulders. Shaking her slightly to emphasize every word as Ryuko swallowed down a lump that had formed in her throat.

“Man, that’s the worst news I’ve heard all month.” Mako raised a questioning eyebrow at her. “Ok, ok, maybe not all month but it’s pretty damn shitty.”

“Oh c’mon Ryuko! What are you worried about?!”

“Oh, I don’t know...” she said. Condescendingly tilting her head in thought. “Death?!”

“Pffff- look. If I could become an assassin, so can you!”

The statement was meant to make her feel better, and Ryuko knew it. But she also knew the exact reason that Mankanshoku Mako had been allowed into the folds of such a dangerous profession.

Satsuki had introduced them not long after Ryuko’s arrival. Then she proceeded to let Ryuko watch Mako interrogate a prisoner. An act that, even after having witnessed her own father’s demise, had left her utterly sleepless for two whole nights.

At recalling the memory, she gently shoved the happy-go-lucky Mako from her lap. Suddenly finding it necessary to put some form of distance between them.

“I guess I have no choice but to go, huh?”

“Mmmmhm!” Mako hummed in affirmation. Watching on as Ryuko got up and brushed the dust off her body.

“You know, Mako...” Ryuko mused aloud, walking side by side with Mako back to the mansion. “I really hope that if I don’t fail, we can become good friends.” The snort that came from Mako was loud enough to echo down the street.

“You silly! We’re already friends!”

Juxtapose

CHAPTER 3: Juxtapose

“Hello?”

Ryuko knelt past the faded crimson noren and into the seemingly decrepit restaurant. Haloed light filtered in through the few dust-caked windows, illuminating the swirling filth in the air. If it hadn't been for the distinct scent of ripe tuna and damp nori, Ryuko might've thought the place abandoned.

“Heeeellooooo?” she raised her voice a bit, her ears picking up on the faint sound of an old tube television playing in the kitchen.

“Yes, yes! Just sit yourself-” a man shuffled through the doorway behind the counter, stopping mid-sentence at the sight of Ryuko. “W-welcome! Please! Sit anywhere!”

“Can I sit at the bar?” she asked coyly. Shooting the older man a smile that pushed her cheeks into her eyes.

“Of course!” he said powerfully. His full bodied voice a contradiction to his elderly wrinkles.

She walked the rest of the distance to the bar. The floor beneath her creaking precariously even as she dragged a stool out and sat down. The man busied himself, head down as he sliced through a broad slab of salmon. Ryuko noted the air with which he held the knife; firm and confident. His salt and pepper mohawk kept moderately maintained with a headband.

“Soooo, you are visiting family?” he asked with an accent as thick as the meat before him. Briskly he sliced the fish into long strips before starting to chop through avocado. Ryuko thought it seemed a shade too dark.

“No. I'm here as a tourist. Parents were Japanese, though.” He hummed while looking up at her. She smiled again. Confidently aware that she had perfected an American accent a decade ago.

“Do you speak some Japanese?” the avocado was finished. Next came the nori and rice.

“Just a little.”

“Ooooh?”

“Just things like- uh...” she leaned forward. Forearms braced on the grimy counter. “Domo. Arigato. Koneechiwa-”

“Ah ah!” he raised the knife threateningly. Aiming the tip at her and popping it each time he hit a syllable in the word. “Kon-nichiwa.”

Ryuko smirked and leaned in a bit further. “Kon-nichiwa?”

“Aaaah,” he grinned and nodded. His hair unmoving even with the abrupt action. “You speak Japanese very good. Your parents taught you well.”

“Hah, they didn’t teach me any.” She sat back as he lifted a plate of finished sushi from behind the counter and into a spot before her.

“Then what brings you to Okinawa?” he asked while questioning her again under his breath about what she would like to drink. She requested for sake and he hummed in obvious approval.

“I came to meet a man.”

“Ooooh?” he had turned to reach for a squat bottle of sake behind him. “Must be a special man.”

“Truth be told, I’ve never met him before.” He extended a ceramic cup to her filled with liquid. She cradled it in her palm just below her chin.

“You’ve never met him. What’s his name?” he turned his back to her again to place the sake bottle back on the shelf. Ryuko sipped gingerly at the wine before dropping the American accent from her voice and responding.

“Tsumugu Kinagase.”

The establishment went quiet save for the solitary sound of the sake bottle shattering against the ground.

Tsumugu turned back slowly. His eyes focused with distress.

“What do you want with Tsumugu Kinagase?”

“I need Japanese steel.” she responded in fluent Japanese.

“And why do you need Japanese steel?” Tsumugu’s eyes burned with a deadly defiance. His mother tongue a more fitting medium for his voice.

“I have vermin to kill.” Ryuko growled the words out as she matched the same emotions that Tsumugu gave off.

“You must have big rats to kill.”

She grinned sinisterly while placing the cup on the countertop. “*Huge.*”

“Hrm.” He nodded. Swaying on the balls of his heels before motioning for Ryuko to follow him up a flight of stairs to her right.

He went first. Swinging the hatch door to the ceiling above them open and letting her step up and into the cramped room. There, she was greeted with the sight of an entire wall lined with exquisite blades of all shapes and colors.

Ryuko hardly noticed her feet had carried her to within an arm's length until she caught herself reaching out to take one off the rack. She paused before doing so, looking back over her shoulder tentatively to where Tsumugu stood, his upper body propped on the floor with his elbow. Making him seem as if he were floating.

“Go on.”

She couldn't help but beam a little. Turning back around to cup a katana in her palms at waist level. It was feather light. With a scabbard black as tar and highlighted with streams of gold. Whipping it around, she clasped the hilt in her right hand and barely pulled. Releasing a bit of the impeccably shined blade to mirror her blue eyes back at her.

“You like samurai swords.” Tsumugu hummed the words. Ryuko turned just in time to watch as he began to reach behind his back. “I've always preferred guns and needles.”

She whipped the blade clean from its scabbard. Catching each of the fine needles that Tsumugu sprayed from the MPG in his hand. They all fell to the ground at her feet. Too diminutive to make a sound. He nodded in approval while pulling himself fully into the room.

“What you see here are the fruits of years of labor,” stepping up to Ryuko he took the blade and scabbard from her hands. Replacing them back to one piece before setting it in its spot on the wall. “I have kept them for their sentimental value. I do not make instruments of death any longer.”

“Then give me one of these.” Ryuko glanced up at the array of blades. In awe suddenly at the amount of them. Truly one man needn't keep all of them to himself.

Tsumugu scoffed. “These are not for sale.”

Ryuko snorted in kind. “I didn't say *sell* it to me. I said *give* me one.”

“*Why?*” she could tell she was trying his mood by the way his brows knit together. His shoulders braced threateningly. Ready to reach for the gun he had shoved behind his apron.

“Because my *vermin* is a former student of yours.” Ryuko took a step forward. Poking an index finger into Tsumugu's chest. “And considering the student. I'd say you have a rather *large* obligation.”

She made sure to skew her face up into a nasty and knowing grin. Tsumugu swallowed laboriously. A fine sheen of sweat on his forehead as he stepped back from her. His mind coming to a conclusion that Ryuko could tell he hadn't been wanting to make. He stumbled a little. Moving to the far side of the room where he wrote a name in kanji on a window pane. His fingertip weighted with understanding as it swept through the dense dirt.

“It will take me a month to forge you the blade,” he began to move down the stairs. “I suggest you spend that time practicing, Matoi Ryuko.”

She let out a scoff as he disappeared. Lumbering to where the window was and using the meaty part of her fist to erase where Tsumugu had written 'Satsuki' in the grime.

Ryuko made sure to blow any leftover remnants off for good measure.

True to his word, it took Tsumugu an entire month of concentrated craftsmanship to forge her blade. Up until the time he finished, she made sure to work the rest of the fatigue from having been catatonic for four years out of her body. All while concentrating on the path she had laid out before herself.

The way was clear enough and her next move was purely strategic. Gamagoori had suggested that she seek out Inumuta. So that's where she would go.

It didn't take her much prying out of the locals to find out that Inumuta had flourished since his days as an assassin underneath Satsuki. With the prestige that came with becoming a cunning killer, on top of his impressive computer related skills, Inumuta had managed to grind the infrastructure of the Japanese underground to a halt. Placing himself solely atop it instead of the poor fool who had been unlucky enough to be there before him.

Ryuko only imagined that Satsuki had supported him financially. Allowing him to garner the rest of the favor necessary to become the head of the yakuza. It all made sense. It meant that Satsuki had another powerful ally. Someone who was able to dispose of anything within the country quickly and quietly. As few questions as possible. Something the Kiryuin's, Ryuko noticed, had always been fond of.

So as she knelt before Tsumugu. In awe, both at the quality and the familiar scissor shape of the blade before her. She knew exactly where she would be headed.

"Be it known," Tsumugu started. His back straight despite the bow in his neck and shoulders. As if a heaviness were upon him. "That I have broken my blood oath to God, and forsaken my honor. Now it is up to you to shoulder the rest of the burden." He raised his arms, presenting the blade in the space between Ryuko and himself. "Revenge is a forest. Easy to be lost in. Remember where you are going. What must be done." She raised her own hands beneath the weapon. Lifting it until the full weight rested upon her and her alone.

With a final nod, she gripped it fully and brought it towards herself. Heart and mind set in steel.

"Thank you."

Ten years earlier.

After sixteen months of rugged and brutal training, it had been decided. It all seemed like an afterthought. The ethereal dream, so much akin to living, that the actual waking was a shock to the system. A bolt upright and a nearly stopped heart. Delivered in the form of a seemingly drab letter. Whose edges were paper-cut thin.

“I have a single bit of advice.” the pause mid-sentence, like most silences left amidst the words that Satsuki chose to speak out loud, was crafted meticulously by design. “If you so choose to want it.”

Her office had left Ryuko with the sense that someone else had decorated it. Stark white walls contrasted like a punch to the gut with maple furnishings. Accented with the blazon tokens of past deeds. Trinkets ranging from miniscule to extravagant- such as a pair of faceted diamond earrings left on display. The jewels the size of Ryuko’s thumb tip. Or the singular piece of ivory that stretched twelve feet in length. Mounted against a slab of obsidian-colored granite that accentuated the fine details carved into the bone.

She had recognized the semblance of the scene immediately upon first glance. The weave of Celtic designs spurring forth the figures of wolves, snakes, and men. A vast tree crumbling to ruin. The craftsmanship had been so advanced she’d marveled for a long moment at the way smooth lines of fire seemed to sway with each tilt of her head. But Ryuko chose to not ask about it, or the other items. While they seemed varied, and so unlikely of the person who frequented the space they resided in, she was certain that every piece had been placed there by the woman in front of her. Each a trophy for acts Ryuko feared she would never be entitled to learn of.

“Sure.” Ryuko pried her eyes away from a daishō stand at the far end of the room. Focusing again on Satsuki as she stood from what the rest in the house referred to as her throne. “If you’ve got something to tell me that’ll help, I won’t say no.”

The briefest of smiles flitted across Satsuki’s features. If Ryuko had blinked she would have missed it. “While it is advice I am not certain it will truly help.”

A few clicks of stiletto heels and Satsuki stood before Ryuko. Her left hand occupied with the pure white scabbard that held her katana, Bakuzen, and her right clutching a box nearly too large for her grip. Ryuko had to tilt back on her heels to allow her gaze to meet Satsuki’s without having to bend her neck back.

“For a year you have been extensively trained. Trained to be wary, cunning, devious...” their eyes never left each other as she spoke. Even when Satsuki rose the box between them. Its edges threatening to dig into Ryuko’s torso. “My advice is, when the time comes... don’t think.”

Ryuko rose an eyebrow at the sentiment and would have pressed further on it had the words not tumbled from Satsuki’s lips. Their inherent trust bred from necessity. “And the box?”

“A gift. Tradition amongst those who come into the Kiryuin line of business.” There was a restrained amount of mirth in Satsuki’s sapphire eyes. Enough to goad Ryuko into taking the box from her and flicking the latch to it open.

The wooden case was lined with a deep purple velvet and Ryuko had to peel back a panel that kept its contents hidden at first. When she yanked on the tab it revealed a Colt .45 revolver beneath it. The metal of which had been shined to the point of near-blinding. Ryuko glanced up at Satsuki, a questioning look, before moving a few paces to the side so she could set the box down on an end table and withdraw the firearm for proper inspection.

“Your first weapon. One that is to be handled by you alone.” Ryuko weighed the gun in her palm. Mesmerized at the intricate patterns etched into the barrel and the wooden grips. She slid her finger across the release on its side, snapping the cylinder out of the frame with a brief flick of her wrist. It revolved on the extractor rod smoothly and each bullet chamber and the barrel were completely devoid of debris. The thing weighed a ton, though. A hint that the frame and mechanisms in it were all machined steel.

Snapping the cylinder back in place Ryuko pulled the hammer back and lined the sights up with a particularly ugly doll seated on a shelf to her left. Then pulled the trigger to the fine tune of it dropping on an empty chamber. She could feel the bubbling sensation of excitement building up behind her ribs. “A revolver, huh?”

“Steady, reliable, and easy to conceal.” Satsuki had moved back to her desk during the time that Ryuko had been enamored with the pistol. She looked over her shoulder to fix Ryuko with a knowing look. “It seemed fitting given the person who it was meant for. Not to mention you showed your highest prowess with a gun of similar stock.”

Ryuko smirked before loading the firearm and slipping it into a secure place between her back and the band of her skirt and panties. Covered completely from sight by the overhang of the leather jacket she tugged over it. When she looked back up she nearly startled at how close Satsuki had gotten. Her fingers extending towards Ryuko with the familiar sight of a boarding pass; which she took without hesitation only to shove into an inner jacket pocket.

“Come. The last tradition dictates you say a farewell to the others before going.” She bit back at a groan to that. Stamping out of the office in tune with Satsuki’s own lithe footsteps.

It took them a few minutes to traverse the expanse of the mansion. Traveling through elegant and lengthy halls that Ryuko had come to know by heart during her stay. She ran her gaze over the fixtures that passed her. Realization taking hold that she had never fully appreciated what was around her. Had never truly comprehended that there would potentially ever be a time she would never see them again. The thought left her mind in a low buzz. Humming its disdain until it was shook clean from her skull by their entrance into a lounge.

“Ryuko!” Mako peeked up from behind a counter. Her eyes just barely able to clear the height of it. But it did nothing to keep her from vaulting the wooden obstruction in an attempt to get to Ryuko in the shortest amount of time.

“Mankanshoku.” Satsuki’s voice rang clean and crisp in the crowded space. Causing Mako to freeze in her spot, legs straddling the countertop in a fashion that caused a slight blush to rise on Ryuko’s cheeks. “Please refrain from putting your body on places that could be used for eating.”

Mako nodded stiffly. Sliding like a shelled egg from where she had been to a spot on the floor.

“Everyone.” this time she addressed the rest of the room. Her hands folding over the pommel of Bakuzen’s grip. “Greet your teammate before her departure.”

Ryuko glanced around. Unsurprised at the seeming apathy of the others in the room as they removed themselves from what they had been occupied with before.

Sanageyama Uzu and Inumuta Houka were the first to leave their activity. Abandoning what Ryuko assumed had been a one-sided game of billiards in favor of blocking the view of the room and Mako's advance.

"Hey, kid. Yah finally got your first assignment, huh?" Sanageyama said. Leaning in and tapping at her shoulder with his knuckles. A broad and idiotic grin plastered to his face beneath forest green hair. The context of which he had assured Ryuko, on many occasions, had been the unfortunate after effect of the chlorine content in the pool behind the house.

"Yep. And please tell me you've washed your hands recently..." Ryuko leaned back, scraping the flat of her palm against the spot he had touched on her jacket.

"Not since the last time I jerked one off-"

"Which was probably a good ten minutes ago, right?" they grinned at each other. Her jest taken in kind with a brief wink before he turned on his heel. His hand raised in farewell.

"Try not to die your first time out there, kid." Ryuko had been about to retort on the second occurrence of the pet name only for Inumuta to cut her off. His hand extending to nearly jam a palm-sized book into her nose.

"For the plane ride." He mumbled. Stepping away the instant after she had fully taken it from him. Glancing down at the cover she noticed that it was a handbook for learning German. The one language she had been weakest in grasping.

With a grumble she placed it on a nearby table. Idling beside a couch that held the hulking figure of Gamagoori Ira and the miniscule one of Jakuzure Nonon. Just as she was about to move away, Gamagoori paused the video game they'd both been enthralled in and stood. Turning to her in a manner that only emphasized his massive girth.

"Matoi. Good luck." He offered his palm to her and Ryuko struggled to fully grip it in her own.

"Thanks, big guy. Keep an eye on Mako for me, ok?"

She had to bite back on a smirk when his face lit up in a healthy shade of scarlet. Eyes darting from Ryuko to over her shoulder and back before seating himself on the couch again. Quickly ending their conversation by unpausing the game.

"Goodbye. Adiós. Never come back." Rolling her eyes, Ryuko leaned slightly over the back of the couch. Raising an eyebrow at Nonon's uncaring attitude.

"Aw, c'mon Jakuzure. Yah know you'd miss me."

"Like a snake missing cold weather." she never once looked away from the television screen as she responded. "Do me the hugest of favors and die miserably while you're at it."

Ryuko reached out and ruffled the pink bangs that had escaped the front of Nonon's beanie. Pulling away swiftly so that Nonon couldn't slap her hand. "I love you, too."

"Fuck off."

"Gladly." there were only two people left in the room for Ryuko to speak with. One of which had taken the initiative to appear right behind her. Nearly startling Ryuko into an early grave with doing so. "Sweet- Iori!"

"Here." Shiro Iori thrust a small duffle bag out between them. The weight of which slightly astonished Ryuko when she took it.

"What the hell is in here? Bricks?" she emphasized the question by bobbing it up and down.

"It's clothing for your trip. Lady Satsuki had me make it for you since your wardrobe is rather... sparse." he grinned. Seemingly amused by what he'd said.

"Well. She did steal me away with only a grieving kimono on. Didn't even let me grab anything else..." Iori nodded.

"She can be... rather impatient at times. I assure you, though, everything in the bag will fit and is appropriate for the weather and activities you'll endure in Belgium." with her own sense of impatience, Ryuko unzipped the duffle bag and combed through what she could see without completely dismantling the package. Some of the things her fingers brushed against seemed of incredibly high quality; satin and silks.

"This is some nice stuff. Thanks, Iori."

"Not a problem, Matoi. Also, you're welcome to keep all of it." a pause passed where Ryuko spied Iori mulling over something else to say. His fingers combing through a portion of blonde hair he constantly left dangling in his eyes. "That is, if you make it back."

"Ah." her response was prompt. Emphasized with a vacant stare.

"I like you, Matoi. So," and at that point he held his hand out to her. Waiting until she had freed up one of her palms to share a firm handshake with him, "I'll be hoping for your safe return."

"Yea." there wasn't much more she could say. Ryuko thought about thanking him, but the words felt hollow even without her breathing air into them. In the end, she let him walk away. Persistent in her determination to not mull over it for long.

Something that Mako did a fine job of helping with. Her arms slithering around Ryuko's midriff in one of the tamest showings of affection that Ryuko had ever witnessed from the girl. "Oh, Ryuko! I know you're gonna do awesome out there!"

"Hah, oh yea? Everyone else seems to think I'm doomed for failure."

"No way! Satsuki-sama wouldn't make you go unless you were ready!" something deep down in Ryuko's guts agreed with the sentiment, even if the rest of her was still in belligerent

denial.

“Whatever yah say, Mako.” she carefully pried Mako’s arms from around her. Making sure to carefully observe her friends soft and caring features before smiling warmly. “I’ll be back. Promise.”

“Matoi.” Satsuki voice remained a commanding presence. Ushering Ryuko’s full attention back to her. “The time has come.”

With a firm nod and a final squeeze to Mako’s biceps, Ryuko left the room. Tailing Satsuki for a short distance down the hall until they came to a stop. An uncomfortable silence ensuing even though Ryuko knew there had to be house staff somewhere nearby.

“Remember what I said.” Satsuki turned to her. Fingers ever so gently reaching out to smooth the collar of Ryuko’s jacket. She swallowed hard, incapable of denying the intoxicating aura that Satsuki always seemed to exude.

No more words passed between them. But when Ryuko locked gazes with Satsuki’s own furtive sapphire eyes, she knew the message that she wanted to relay. “I’ll be back, Satsuki-sama.”

Ryuko wasted no more time. Leaving the manor promptly and loading herself, and her small duffle bag, into a sleek black Cadillac. It’s driver being Iori’s uncle, Mitsuzo Soroi. Satsuki’s own personal butler, who Ryuko had grown fond of even in their short passing. “Are you ready, Ryuko-sama?”

“One-hundred percent! Let’s do this!”

The drive to the airport was uneventful. Checking in even less so. Perks came with being associated to the Kiryuin name. Loose security checks being one. Something Ryuko figured was a necessity, considering that they were supposed to be constantly armed to the teeth. She even had to admit she’d forgotten about the pistol already on her until she was standing in front of one of the guards. Showing off the boarding pass like the action was a part of her everyday lifestyle. The weight of the firearm completely forgotten until he looked her up and down. Head to toes and back. Before motioning for her to step around the line and through a hidden thoroughfare. Completely bypassing any machines that would’ve alerted them to her illegal hitchhiker pistol.

No luxury was barred, either, and Ryuko soon found herself lounging back in a first-class seat. A cold glass of champagne to greet her, as well as a hot towel. The combination of which had her dozing off for the remainder of her thirteen hour flight to Brussels, Belgium.

About an hour before their landing, Ryuko was woken from her peaceful slumber to a flight attendant speaking in fluent German over the cabin speakers. There was something uneasy about it that Ryuko couldn’t place until the woman repeated what she’d said in English, “We will be landing in Brussels, Belgium in little under an hour. Please take a form...”

She could barely speak German. Let alone understand the Dutch the Belgium’s used. Thinking back she reached under the seat in front of her. Pulling out her duffle bag and

ripping through its contents only to find she'd done herself the biggest disservice.

Ryuko had forgotten the pocket dictionary back at the manor.

"Fuck." her sudden outburst roused the person who had been seated beside her.

It's cool. It's fine. Ryuko cradled her suddenly throbbing head between her palms. *I'll just stop somewhere and get another one. Can't be that hard to find. Hell, the airport probably has one. There's plenty of time... plenty of...*

Terror, a stark chill that ran down the length of Ryuko's spine, gripped her in full as her brain began to churn through the process of an assassination run. A process she had been trained to follow to a 'T'. At least, in practice she had been. She searched the rest of the duffle bag, unzipping every compartment on the sides until she came across a manila folder. With hectic movements she nearly ripped the documents in half attempting to get to the contents inside the envelope.

I'm so fucked. it was all bad news. The boarding pass she would use for her return trip was set for four hours from her touch down at the Brussels airport. Her first mission would be a speed test. "Who the hell schedules these damn fli- *Nonon.*"

She hissed the name with discontent as she fixed her now highly confused seat mate with a glare. He seemed every shade of perturbed and distressed. Index finger poised above the assistance call button. The situation was starting to go from bad to worse and Ryuko could feel panic starting to speed her heart.

"Ugh!" she threw her hands up, flopping back into her seat with a scowl. Before she could stop herself she'd glanced over at the man, his finger still precariously close to blowing her cover. "Parlez-vous français?"

"O-oui?" she wasn't certain how she'd precisely ascertained his nationality but she had a feeling it had to do with the overwhelming cologne he'd sprayed on his cerulean turtle neck. A stench that could only come from an overpriced perfume.

French, though. Ryuko could speak French. "Look. My boyfriend is a god damn idiot." the man seemed to ease a bit now that Ryuko was speaking in a language he could understand instead of the frantic Japanese she'd been speaking before. "He *knew* I wasn't going to have my sister around to translate for me, I don't know *why* he got me all my information in Dutch."

"T-that seems... unfortunate?" the man murmured, his meticulously cared for eyebrows screwing up as Ryuko slapped a brochure down on the tray in front of him.

"It is. Could you tell me where I'll find this hotel?" they held eye contact for an uncomfortable amount of time before Ryuko started tapping rhythmically on the plastic surface to get his attention.

He turned out to be more helpful than she had assumed he could be. Not only did he speak a language she could understand, he also understood the Dutch and German she was about to

run into. It took her a half-hour to get all of the helpful information she needed from him in between bouts of filler conversation, but by the time they'd landed she'd gotten what she needed. All while calming his nerves towards her.

Mission accomplished. Sort of.

Her mark had positioned himself at a renowned hotel in the middle of Brussels. Even if she hadn't ascertained the location of it from the man on the plane, merely handing the brochure to one of the lingering taxi drivers had been enough. With her duffle bag safely in the seat beside her, the taxi pulled away from the curb. Driving them through narrow streets packed with dense, grey buildings. Something that she could barely make out from the fine smattering of streetlights illuminating the outer reaches of the city. As they moved closer towards the epicenter of civilization, she could discern more details about what they were skimming past. Though for all it was worth, Ryuko wished she had been there during the day. Street lights could only do so much to show off the old stone architecture.

It took them only half an hour to get to the Hotel Amigo from the airport. There was barely any traffic, and Ryuko figured that was a product of it being close to two in the morning. Even the driver yawned every five minutes, something that left her feeling uneasy. And she wondered if it would be acceptable for her to lean over and shake the man at intervals.

They arrived at her destination with no incidence, though, and Ryuko threw the taxi driver a few extra euros. Hardly worried about the cost of doing so when she had found an envelope stuffed with paper bills inside her bag. As he drove away, she took a deep breath. Calming the nerves that were already starting to come unraveled.

The Hotel Amigo, the French man on the plane had told her as he read the brochure out loud, had been in business since 1957. Its particular building, though, had stood in Brussels for nearly five-hundred years. The first mention of it coming across in paperwork when the city had purchased it from a wealthy man, only to turn it into a prison.

"Guten..." Ryuko hung on her first word, garnering the attention of a stuffy middle-aged receptionist who seemed far too engrossed with the paperwork in front of her.

"Goedemorgen." she responded in Dutch. Eyes angling over the edge of her glasses to pin Ryuko with a knowing stare before speaking again in heavily accented English. "Do you have a reservation?"

"Ah," Ryuko dug through her duffle bag, removing a bottled water she'd taken off the plane and placing it on the counter before pulling out the manila folder. "Yea. It's in here somewhere."

As she began to painstakingly remove some of the documentation from the envelope, the receptionist looked back down at the papers in front of her. Even as Ryuko continued to lay page after page of useless information out, she nudged a nearby box of tissues off the counter. Landing it into her bag before jerking her arm haphazardly. The action swiping the bottle of water from the counter and onto the table in front of the woman. Its cap, having been replaced as loosely as possible, popped off. Effectively dousing the receptionist and the paperwork in front of her.

“Ah!” Ryuko looked around, trying to find something to help the shocked lady dry herself off with. “I’m so, so, sorry!”

“It-it’s okay. Give me a moment.” the woman stood from her seat and disappeared through a doorway behind the counter. The heels of her shoes resonating for a short while until the door swung closed with a soft click.

Ryuko stood for half a second. Her ears adjusting to the noises in the open space. Before turning around and observing that there was no one else in the lobby. The only camera she had noticed upon entry was angled at her back. She would just have to assume that Inumuta could do his job at a later date and that any security guards watching the live footage were too bored with the previous content of the night.

Picking up her duffle bag, Ryuko hopped the counter. Looking down the stretch of table space until her eyes caught on a specific leather-bound pad. Letters emblazoned in gold on the front reading, “GROOTBOEK”. When she flipped it open there were lines of entries depicting names, times, and room numbers. *Doesn’t get much easier than that.* she thought to herself. Sliding it off the counter and into her bag before hastily jumping back over and exiting the lobby via a hallway to her left. Behind her, she could hear the faint sound of footsteps and the click of the door as it was closed once again.

She didn’t stop to look at the book until she had trotted up two flights of stairs. The exercise managing to clear her thoughts a bit after the excitement of her ploy. Glancing through the names column as she flipped through the pages proved sufficient enough in finding a time and room number for her mark. Confirming that he’d returned at a relatively decent hour, something that Ryuko hoped meant that he would be sound asleep in his bed.

But just because she had managed to make her way through so many obstacles unhindered, didn’t mean she was going to continue to do so. Something that became apparent to her as soon as she’d made her way to the top most floor. A location where the hotel had chosen to put its most luxurious suite: the Armand Blaton. And where there are people with money, there are often times-

“Hands on your head.” the low voice was followed with the simultaneous click of a pistol’s hammer being pulled back. Ryuko slowly raised her hands, folding them against the back of her skull. All she could think about as she did it was how grateful she was the man was speaking in French.

She wouldn’t be certain how the events that transpired played out until a few hours later, but what started them was the feeling of the firearm’s muzzle tapping once against the base of her skull. A thought distinctly struck Ryuko at that moment. Wondering what idiot school her mark had gotten this body guard from because feeling that pistol was enough for her to know he was within grappling range. And before he could react she’d twisted around, disarmed him, and pressed the barrel of her revolver so tightly against his temple that it muffled the shot to a dull *thup*.

That small victory, though, pushed Ryuko over into her adrenaline. Huffing laboriously even as she attempted to listen for any sort of noise. Any footsteps, or shouting. But all she could hear was her heartbeat. Thumping obnoxiously in her ears.

Move, Matoi. she thought. The dead-weight of the man she'd been holding in her arms suddenly too much for her limbs to carry any longer. *Don't think. Just move.*

Her legs felt like lead. So dense that they were difficult to maneuver at first. Every step she took resonated through her skull; too loud, too obvious. Even if she knew it wouldn't matter. And after she blinked once she was suddenly inside the suite.

The mark was seated at a conference desk. Oblivious to her presence. His head slightly bowed and attention focused on something before him. Ryuko didn't care to wonder what it was as she reached down and retrieved the scissor blade from her boot. Flicking her wrist to transform it into a five foot long blade.

It didn't come to her till later how fortunate she would be with her first task. The man never spoke a word. Not even when she leaned the sharp of the blade against the back of his neck and watched as he sat straighter. Nerves gone tight at the instant realization of danger. But she never gave him an opportunity to react. The blade already pulled back before his lips could move. His last breath taken before she severed his head from his body with one clean stroke.

Ryuko had three thoughts as she sat safely on her return flight, mind still humming from the action. The first was information. Something she had read a long time ago about how casinos used a specific type of carpeting. Ones with patterns and colors that were hard for a human's eye to comprehend in motion. So you were forced to constantly look up at the machines. Bright flashing lights attracting you to them so you'd spend more money. The hotel had that. Long stretches of carpet in bright golds and royal blues in the constant shapes of diamonds and long lines. It made her dizzy to think about.

The second came after some time. Thinking about the suite itself. Marble counter tops and expensive furniture. Technology that most people wouldn't see on the market for years. Ryuko wondered if Satsuki had stayed there before. A place like that seemed suited to the Kiryuin woman. Maybe once Ryuko told her about it, told her about everything, Satsuki would want to see it for herself. Maybe she would be proud.

And the last and final thought was one that would change Ryuko's life. It was something that she couldn't help but grin about her entire way home.

She had genuinely enjoyed her first assassination.

Goodnight Moon

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains explicit sexual content.

CHAPTER 4: Goodnight Moon

“Momma! Momma!” there should’ve been the sound of hectic footsteps paired with the crescendo in the girl’s voice but none ever came. Even as she stepped into the expansive bathing room. “I have *splendid* news!”

“Oooh?” the woman drawled out the syllable. Languorous to the point that it almost seemed endless. “Come then, Nui. My child. Tell me of this news.”

“Of course!” it took an unnaturally short period of time for Nui to remove her own clothing and slip into the bath. The woman opened her arms, welcoming her entirely. An eerie glow beginning to radiate from her visage as Nui slipped into her lap.

“Now, what is of such high importance as to disturb me?” there was a razor blade underneath the woman's tone but Nui seemed to pay it no mind. Her lips still curved into an exaggerated smile.

“Oh! Ryuko is out of her coma!” Nui clapped her hands together excitedly. “And she’s managed to get that old dog, Tsumugu to make her a new blade and everything! She’s going to go try and kill Satsuki’s old gang!”

“Is that so?” the woman kept her eyes closed. Appearing wholly unfazed by the news. “This may turn out better than we had hoped.”

“Right?! I thought so, too!” some time passed before the woman opened her eyes, a sinister smile pulling across her lips.

“Nui, go check up on Inumuta for mommy, ok?”

“Anything for my momma!”

“Oh, and one more thing, Nui,” and before Nui could react, the woman had struck out at her. Gripping her viciously by the face with one of her hands. The nails of which came dangerously close to drawing blood. The smile never faded from Nui’s face.

“Whut’s dat?” a long moment passed as the woman’s eyes bored into Nui’s with a deadly intent.

“Does Satsuki know yet that Ryuko is her sister?”

Eight years earlier.

“Jesus Christ, how long is this gonna fuckin’ take?” Ryuko groaned. Leaning back in the uncomfortable folding metal chair she had been glued to for nearly nine hours. Rubbing at her eyes until static filled blobs swam in her vision.

“Stop complaining and keep your eyes busy, Matoi.” Nonon pulled back from where she had been hunched over a rifle and picked up a cigarette she had lit twenty minutes ago from an ashtray that was on the ground. Ryuko watched as she took a drawl from the bud that looked inconceivable long for a person of her stature. “We could be here for days if you don’t spot the mark.”

“Yea.” after stretching and popping the stiffness out of her back, Ryuko put her face back to the spotting scope she had set up beside Nonon’s sniper rifle. At seven-hundred and forty-one yards, Ryuko could make out the details of each person that entered or exited the busy French cafe. It was just a waiting game at that point. “Still sucks.”

“Look. If you didn’t keep getting fucking hurt while you’re out on your missions, maybe Satsuki-sama wouldn’t have had to pair you up with others,” the huff that Nonon gave made Ryuko think of a water buffalo with its vigor, “it’s like a god damn buddy system now thanks to your fuck ups.”

“I don’t want to hear that from the munchkin who shot through three civilians to hit her last target.” Ryuko quipped. Keeping her eyes focused on the scene she could see at the cafe even if she worried a little that Nonon might retaliate with a knife in her back. To her relief, the only noise in the room was that of Nonon vigorously stamping her cigarette out into the glass tray.

“Shit happens in this profession. Can’t be perfect every time and I took the best opportunity that presented itself.”

“This is why you need someone scoping for you, Jakuzure.”

“And what about you, huh?” her tone was hostile but the only noise other than her voice was that of her compulsively pulling the slide back on her gun to check that there was a bullet loaded. Something Ryuko noticed she did almost every five minutes. “Why *do* you keep getting hurt on your missions, Matoi?”

Ryuko knew she didn’t have to answer if she didn’t want too. So she kept her mouth shut, eyes still focused into the scope. The truth was, Ryuko could stop getting hurt any time she wanted. It wasn’t like she was actually as clumsy as everyone had decided she was. But after her first mission, when she returned home with a chest puffed out with pride in her accomplishment, it had been the most humbling of blows when all Satsuki did was congratulate her with a postal slip full of money. Not a single word offered up in praise. Hell, their eyes didn’t even meet during the entire encounter.

“You know what I think it is?”

On her fourth mission out she'd tripped a bounding mine while sneaking around her marks estate. Luckily for her, the propelling charge had been faulty, resulting in the mine merely detonating in the ground. The shrapnel meant to tear her midriff apart, harmlessly burying itself in the dirt. But aside from the noise it caused rousing nearly every foot soldier on the premises, the bursting charge had caused the tube and cap to explode. The molten plastic burying itself in the back of her right thigh and calf. Despite the lengthy, and impressive, string of expletives she'd managed to string together Ryuko had called in an extraction. Managing to hobble off far enough and lay low until she was retrieved an excruciating twelve hours later.

But what really threw her a curveball was waking up back in San Diego. Comfortably laid up in the mansion infirmary. Only to find that Satsuki was sitting beside her bed, waiting for her to wake up. Genuine concern etched on her face even as she attempted to conceal it through quips of business talk and recovery time.

Ryuko was on her next mission not six days later.

“I think you're too scared to kill people. That your first mission was a fuckin' hoax and now you're too freaked out to admit it.” Ryuko had been about to give a snide response when her eyes caught the briefest flash of a man with a dark toupee. His attire that of a mid-century French officer, complete with a kepi tucked underneath his arm as he ducked through the entrance to the restaurant.

“Mark confirmed.” beside her, Ryuko could hear Nonon hurriedly getting back into position. The familiar sound of the slide being pulled back echoed one last time in the room before silence ensued.

“I don't see him.” Nonon said. The faintest sound of her calmly inhaling through her teeth a sign to Ryuko that she was gradually lowering her heart rate. Preparing for the shot to come.

“Don't worry,” she spent a moment quietly observing the entrance before ever so gently nudging the scope so that she could see the cafe's outside seating, “he'll sit outside today.”

Nonon didn't respond but Ryuko could feel the burning questions she wanted to ask regardless.

“No one dressed like that just wants to garner the attention of the people indoors. He wants the attention of everyone walking by, too.” As if on cue, their mark exited the side door of the establishment to sit at one of the round outdoor tables.

A woman that Ryuko hadn't seen him enter with seated herself opposite at the table. And as they sat down she realized most of his figure was concealed by the obnoxious red and white striped umbrella that was shading them from the midday sun. “Son of a bitch.”

“Patience, Jakuzure,” she breathed. Observing a well-groomed tree that resembled a lollipop sway slightly beside the table. The woman ordered orange juice, and she had to keep one hand rested on her head a moment as she trapped her napkin beneath the beverage. “Wind's

coming in from the southwest at approximately six and a half knots. Adjust your elevation two feet up and three to the right.”

“Done.” The man was reaching out across the table, taking the woman’s hands in one of his own.

“Keep a bead. Wait for my mark.” He was leaning forward, closer to the woman. So typical of someone completely infatuated with another. “Mark’s exposed. You have a visual?”

“Confirmed.”

“Fire at will, Jakuzure.”

The shot didn’t make any noise with all of the mods Nonon had lovingly added to the rifle throughout the years. At most, past the haze of Ryuko’s own adrenaline, all she heard was a faint *tinkCLACK* from Nonon instinctively working the action to load in a fresh bullet and eject the empty hull. Ryuko watched through the scope as a few painstaking seconds dragged on where nothing seemed to happen. She didn’t even blink for fear of missing anything. Then, as if on cue, the woman abruptly stood from her seat, sending it flying on its back to the ground. Index finger pointed accusingly at the man, even as his body lurched forward. What little was remaining of his skull colliding against it, sending bits and pieces of brain matter and bone scuttling across the white surface.

“Kill confirmed,” Ryuko breathed. Pulling back from the scope, she blinked a few times to adjust to the dim lighting of the room before smirking at Nonon. “I hate to admit this but, nice shot munchkin.”

“And I hate to do the same but nice scoping.” They both nodded at each other. Affirming the slightly awkward sense of camaraderie that seemed to ebb between them before they both refocused on the task at hand. Turning to their instruments and beginning to break them down into the cases they had originally been stored in.

“Should be good timing to get back home, yea?” Ryuko asked. Watching as Nonon began placing pieces of the rifle into an unassuming metal case.

“Should be. We’re gonna have to jump the pond back to England, but that won’t take too long. Then it’s just a twelve hour flight back home.” Ryuko focused on fitting the scope back into a case that matched the one for Nonon’s rifle before asking any other questions.

“And what are we going to do with these?” She motioned to the packed gun and scope. Watching as Nonon hefted the case for hers off the ground and started heading for the kitchen to the empty apartment.

“We’re gonna leave ‘em here. Inumuta will have someone come pick them up later.” Following Nonon’s lead, Ryuko packed the scope case into a cupboard with the rifle. Making sure it was closed all the way before heading back to grab the rucksack she had stuffed with necessities for the mission, tossing it over her shoulder.

“Cool. That makes life easy, now we can just-” except, Ryuko hadn’t planned at all on making anything easy for this mission. The thought of going back to the mansion, potentially going back without the promise of seeing Satsuki, wasn’t an option.

“Mato-” Nonon barely got the second syllable of her name out before Ryuko pushed the door of the apartment open. Fully aware that she had watched Nonon, ten hours ago, arm the door to blow with a trip wire and a fist-sized lump of C4.

It would look like an accident, Ryuko knew that. How could she be expected to remember that Nonon always trapped her backside during a sniper mission? Especially after such a lengthy portion of exhausting time? She would play it off like she had all the other times.

There was a faint snapping noise as the trip line was pulled taught and broke. Then came the bang of the explosion, followed swiftly with a high-pitched whine. When Ryuko came too, she was laid out on her back. Eyes rolling like she’d drank ten too many straight-whiskeys the night before.

As her hearing sluggishly came back she could make out the ringing of fire alarms. Not a good thing but a necessary side effect none the less. And as she rolled onto her side she could make out the form of Nonon sprawled like a ragdoll on the ground. A fine trickle of blood starting to trail down the line of her nose and cheek. “Aw shit.”

Ryuko reached into the inner pocket of her leather jacket and felt around for a smooth remote. She flipped up a plastic protective case before flicking the toggle switch that sat beneath it. Only after she knew the emergency extraction had been called did she drag herself to Nonon’s side. Relieved to find that she was only unconscious, her breathing normal and unlabored.

“Errugh,” Ryuko groaned. Managing, just barely, to pull herself to her feet before hefting the unconscious Jakuzure onto her shoulder. “C’mom yah little shit. Wouldn’t want someone to find us just layin’ out in the open.”

Much to Ryuko’s chagrin, she could pick up the faintest rebuttal from a barely conscious Nonon. “Fuck you, Matoi.”

Their extraction came within fifteen minutes. Something Ryuko found absolutely astonishing considering their location. But as they were loaded onto a military chopper, she was utterly thrilled to see that Satsuki was along for the ride as well. She was the last person Ryuko cared to see before falling into her own darkness. The stress of the day and the physical punishment she had put herself through, too much to bear any longer.

It took her three days to wake up back at the mansion.

“Hardly surprising that you woke before, Nonon.” Ryuko’s vision hadn’t fully returned but she knew it was Satsuki’s voice. So suave and elegant in its long tones, that it was akin to spoken cursive. “Though, that is probably a good thing.”

There came two staccato raps of heels against wood flooring just as Ryuko blinked the blurriness from her eyes. Satsuki’s visage came to block the view of the ceiling above her. No

anger or displeasure resided in the depths of her sapphire gaze and Ryuko had to bite back on the urge to smile.

“It was good luck for you two that I had business to take care of in the vicinity.” Warm light was seeping into the room through enormous windows. The white curtains hanging across them barely enough to keep the brunt of the morning rays quelled. All it served to do was grant a halo of light to Satsuki that ebbed like the radiance of her confidence.

“Wish I was always so lucky.” Ryuko muttered. Her chest constricting when Satsuki offered a faint smile at her words. But as she attempted to sit up from the bed, Satsuki placed the flat of her palm to Ryuko’s chest.

“Rest. I need you in top form as soon as possible.” The solid press of her digits was nothing short of comforting and before Ryuko could stop herself, the sensation had lulled her back to sleep.

Two weeks of bed rest passed before Ryuko was back on her feet and in fighting condition. Something that baffled almost every physician that had tended to her wounds. It didn’t help that Nonon was still belligerently bed-bound at that time. Having to limp around on comically tiny crutches even as Ryuko was excused from the infirmary. Her body promptly back in top form to the point she could even return to exercising.

“You’re a freak of nature, Matoi!” Nonon hissed through tight lips as she watched Ryuko give a punching bag a vigorous run for its money. “You took the full brunt of that blast and yet here you are!”

“Aaaaaw, c’mon Jakuzure.” She paused a moment to hug the bag, shooting Nonon a pouty face as she did so. “You’re hurting my feelings.”

“I’m gonna hurt you a whole god damn more once I’m fuckin’ healed,” Nonon accused. Staring daggers at Ryuko as she massaged one of her calves. “If I ever have to go on a mission with you again I’m going to kill you and make it look like an accident.”

Ryuko chuckled and took a step back from the bag. Resuming her workout by throwing kicks at it in varying heights. “Like- to see- yah try!”

“Nonon. Matoi.” The sound of Satsuki’s commanding voice ringing out through the space was enough to cause the two women to pause their bickering. Both standing as straight as they could as Satsuki approached them from across the room packed with fitness equipment. “I have news.”

“Yes, Satsuki-sama?” they both responded in unison. Growling at each other after they had done so.

“A high profile mission assignment has come in.” Satsuki paused to lock eyes with both of them before continuing. “With how important it is, Mother has assigned it to me.”

Ryuko looked over in time to watch Nonon’s eyes light up in pride. “Congratulations, Satsuki-sama-”

“And Matoi will be accompanying me.” If it hadn’t been for the premise of what Satsuki had said, Ryuko may have exploded in laughter at the way Nonon’s reaction did a complete one-eighty.

“WHAT?!” Ryuko had only ever seen Nonon let loose the proverbial rage hounds a couple times. Of those moments, she had always been glad she wasn’t on the receiving end. Finding some level of mirth in what would happen to the person it was aimed at; typically a thick-skulled Sanageyama.

“Nonon.” But if there was one thing that Satsuki was good at, it was controlling her subordinates with her words. And just that one word, a single saying of her name, was enough to stop Jakuzure’s imminent flurry of anger. “We will speak later about this. For now, you are excused.”

Never had Ryuko seen so many emotions be elicited from Nonon in such a short period of time. But here they were, with what appeared to be a completely heartbroken Nonon, hobbling from the room on her crutches in about the most pathetic display of sulking Ryuko had ever seen. And for all it was worth, she couldn’t help but get a little bit of satisfaction out of the whole thing.

“Ryuko.” It was her turn once Nonon had left the room. Ryuko gave her full attention back to Satsuki, but failed to say anything because of her blinding radiance. It constantly managed to leave Ryuko tongue-tied at the worst possible moments. “We leave tonight. The mission details are in your room.”

All Ryuko could do was bow until the sound of Satsuki’s footsteps had drifted into the further reaches of the house. Then when she figured the coast was clear, she did a little victory dance, kicked the punching bag a few more times, then ran to her room. Nearly colliding with Soroi on the way.

Just as Satsuki had said, the mission details were sitting on her desk in a tightly closed manila folder. When she went to lift it, she noted how heavy it was. There would be a lot of reading involved if she wanted to keep up with Satsuki. The challenge of which left Ryuko with all of the motivation she needed to sit down and read through the whole contents of folder. She wasn’t about to let this opportunity go to waste, not even if it involved reading nearly two-hundred pages of information.

By the time she had finished, the sun had already set. Three consecutive raps at her door roused her from checking the bags she had packed for the fifth time. Ryuko wouldn’t have admitted it, but she made sure to smooth her jacket out a bit before opening the door with a sense of authority.

“Ready?” Satsuki asked, even as Ryuko was moving back across the room to burden her shoulders with bags of gear.

“Absolutely.” Her tone was stone-solid; confident. Even if she was still reeling a bit from the mission details.

Satsuki just hummed in approval, giving Ryuko the slightest of smirks before slipping away from the door. A silent invitation to follow that Ryuko took like a ravenous dog.

They traversed the hauntingly quiet halls of the mansion in their own comfortable silence and Ryuko wondered idly if Nonon wasn't far off. Witnessing their departure through the lens of a sniper scope. She intentionally took a few longer strides at the thought, putting Satsuki in between herself and the huge pane windows beside them.

Soroi was already waiting for them outside. Door to the limo open and welcoming. Ryuko watched as Satsuki slipped inside without missing a beat. Her own entrance far less elegant in every sense.

"Shall we do a quick run through of the plan?" the limo had started to pull away from the mansion when Satsuki spoke.

"Sure. There are a few things I have questions about." If Satsuki had been surprised by Ryuko's enthusiasm, she hid it. Leaning over, she began to remove her heels before responding.

"From the beginning then. Ask your questions when appropriate." Ryuko swallowed hard, averting her eyes as Satsuki pulled the turtle-neck sweater she'd been wearing over her head. From her peripheral vision Ryuko could see her folding it neatly before placing it on the seat beside her.

"Oh, me? Uh- sure." Eyes still focused on the back of Soroi's practically bald noggin, Ryuko continued to press forward. "Soroi is going to be dropping us off at our mark's location, which happens to be one of the more extravagant parties that takes place during this time of year in Los Angeles."

"Most in attendance are those of the upper echelon of societies all over the world." Satsuki added and Ryuko could feel her face lighting up as she realized even more clothing had been added to the pile. "We have been instructed to blend in."

"Y-yea. Though, therein is my first question. The mission details specifically say you'll be unable to speak?" lost in her question, Ryuko looked towards Satsuki in habit. The sight of her arching her hips off the seat to pull on a pair of white slacks practically knocking Ryuko unconscious.

"Mmm." There was something so purposeful about the pause that Satsuki took to reply as she leaned over to grab a baby blue button down shirt from her bag. The long, silky, plane of her back seemingly stretching on forever. "That is because you and I will be a couple tonight."

A high-pitched wheeze was all Ryuko offered up. Eyes still glued to Satsuki's figure as she threaded toned and slender arms through the dress shirt.

"Do you remember our names, Matoi?" with each button Satsuki did up, Ryuko slowly regained coherence.

“Erh, yea. Now that I know it wasn’t a typo in the papers, you’ll be moonlighting as Monsieur Alain Archambeau and I’ll be your...” she paused. Gesturing widely with her hand until Satsuki responded.

“My consort.” She finished tucking in her shirt before reaching back down to the bag.

“Oh. Well. That’s nice. Glad to see I’m not worthy of the wife position.”

The look Satsuki pinned her with was chilling, causing goosebumps to rise on Ryuko's forearms. "Would you prefer that?"

"Erh. No. It's going to be easier the way it is, anyways." There shouldn't have been a playful air to Satsuki's words, but that's what Ryuko discerned. Suddenly uncertain as to what she had feared so much in that moment. "Then I guess I'll be your consort: Mademoiselle Genevieve du Lac."

"Good. You did your reading." At Satsuki's jab, Ryuko recoiled in faux hurt.

"Excuse you." She watched as Satsuki put on the finishing touches. Which included a regal button up jacket, with all the bells and whistles, including gold trim at the loop holes and the same colored pads and frills at the shoulders. It took her a moment to gather up the lengthy tresses of her dark locks into a manageable bunch before concealing them beneath an officer's cap, decorated the same white with gold accents. "You still haven't explained why you won't be able to talk."

"I'm not particularly inclined to mimic a man's voice." Ryuko watched as Satsuki dug around in her luggage until she removed a cosmetics bag. There was something a little unsettling as she began to remove certain implements; a baggy of fake hair and adhesive.

"So, what you're trying to tell me is, you can't talk like a guy?" of all the skills Ryuko had imagined Satsuki possessed, it had never occurred to her that there may be one's she didn't. Even learning that much about the secretive Kiryuin was enough to leave her chest clenched and tingling.

"Not particularly well, no."

"Then why are you going as the dignified military man?"

"Are you attempting to tell me you would be better suited to the role?"

"Well, I can at least fake a decent dude voice."

Satsuki turned her head, fully pinning Ryuko with a pointed glare. She cleared her throat, sitting up straighter and offering her hand to Satsuki.

"I am Monsieur Alain Archambeau, it's a pleasure to meet your acquaintance." Ryuko let the words flow from her in a deep tone, yet still embellished with a French accent.

"Mmm." Satsuki sat back, legs crossing as she stretched her arms out. Resting them across the seat and a portion of the counter connected to the minibar. "Impressive. Your notes never

showed that you had garnered such a skill.”

"What can I say? There's a lot you don't know about me." Ryuko attempted to not let those words ring with any sort of resentment. But after observing a brief flash of something in Satsuki's eyes, she knew she'd failed.

"I will be the first to admit that my impersonation and espionage skills are no match for your own, Matoi." Satsuki started. The index finger on her left hand idly running along the smooth contour of the limo's window. "Quite frankly, that was why pairing us up on this mission was so crucial. We both have a set of skills. Each incredibly important in their own way."

It left Ryuko speechless to hear those words from Satsuki. All she could do was nod in response.

"Now, would you prefer to switch roles tonight knowing that?" their conversation had finally come full circle and Ryuko shook her head.

"No, Satsuki-sama." She began to reach down to the floor where her own bags had ended up. Unzipping one and beginning to pull out a sheer, scarlet, evening gown. "Little late for me to start questioning your judgement on shit."

"Glad you agree. Now," Satsuki rummaged around in the cosmetics purse again, producing a vial of black liquid, "take care of that red streak in your hair before you change clothing."

Once they had both assumed their disguises, Satsuki and Ryuko spent the rest of the car ride to their destination discussing the mission plans in detail. Timing was going to be important, and they both synced their watches to one another's as they pulled up to their destination.

A valet that had been appointed to sidewalk duty pulled the car door open for them, allowing Satsuki to exit the limo. As Ryuko took her hand and was gently tugged from out of the cab, she went from being Ryuko, to being Mademoiselle Genevieve du Lac. A person she would be- mind, body, and soul- for the next twenty minutes.

Ryuko hungrily threaded her arm through the elbow that Satsuki offered up to her. Making sure to lean her head ever so slightly against her shoulder for a brief moment before they made their way up a short flight of stairs to the entrance of the hotel.

"Your invitation, Monsieur?" the doorman asked them and Ryuko looked up at Satsuki as she began to pat at her jacket pockets.

"Uuu, Alain, do not tell me you left it in the cab." She muttered in English that was thick with a French accent.

"Hrm." Satsuki had to untangle their arms to get at an inner pocket in her jacket, retrieving a pristine envelope that she offered up to the man. He took it and inspected the elegant cursive font on the front before nodding in approval and stepping to the side. Granting them entrance into the party.

“Have a wonderful evening, Monsieur Alain Archambeau. Mademoiselle Genevieve du Lac.” Ryuko curtsied for good measure as she passed him. Making sure to flash the sweetest of smiles his way before linking arms again with Satsuki.

The entire affair was French to its core. Extravagant, flamboyant, and filled with much the same. Proving, without a doubt, that their mark was intensely proud of his mother land. Something Ryuko noted and filed away, even as she began to tug slightly against Satsuki’s arm. Attempting to guide them further into the party without seeming to be the one leading.

It took her a few minutes of carefully scanning the room to find their mark. He had bunched himself up within a group, nearly being concealed because of his relatively short stature. Ryuko looked up at Satsuki and stood on her tips toes, even in heels, so that she could brush her lips ever so slightly against the curve of her jaw. Effectively catching her attention so she could nod her head in the direction of their mark.

“Come, Alain,” she cooed enticingly, “It would be rude for us to not say hello to our host.”

Satsuki responded with a curt nod of her head. Perfectly unfazed by Ryuko’s teasing.

“Excusez-moi, Monsieur Francois la Grande?” knowing full well the implications of what she was doing, Ryuko butted into the conversation he had been having with the people around him. Despite his seeming want to be offensive at her intrusion at first, as soon as he took in her full figure, his disdain melted away. “Might I introduce to you Monsieur Alain Archambeau?”

“Ooo, Monsieur Archambeau. Much has been spoken of your family as of late. Quite rare for a Japanese lineage to embed itself so whole-heartedly into our culture, but so welcome none the less. Especially when they bring such...” and at that moment, Francois la Grande went from shaking Satsuki's hand quite vigorously to ever so gently capturing Ryuko's. Only to deliver the faintest of kisses to the back of her knuckles, "beauty, to our country."

She batted her eyelashes at him, playing coy as she sidled ever closer to Satsuki before casting her eyes up. Offering an expression of expectation towards her, only for it to fall into mock melancholy when Satsuki continued to angle her eyes forward. Not speaking a word.

"Oh, my apologies on behalf of Alain, Monsieur," she leaned closer to Francois, her lips concealed with the back of her hand in a shoddy attempt to muffle her words, "he is not much of a talker. In fact, he brings me precisely because he knows I'll do all the talking for him."

They shared in a light chuckle at Satsuki's expense. "Maybe Monsieur Archambeau would be willing to part with you for a short while? I would love to hear all that you have to speak for him."

Ryuko hadn't realized it in the heat of the moment until Satsuki's grip had gotten near bone-shattering in potential. She glanced over, taking her eyes off the particularly greasy faced Francois, only to be met with a sudden, and forceful, kiss. Satsuki's fingers even wrapped around the back of her neck, keeping her completely involved. Not that Ryuko had to be coerced in any way to put a bit of effort into it. Her own lips fervently matching the passion with which Satsuki's moved against hers. So much so, that when Satsuki moved to pull away,

Ryuko clamped on to her bottom lip. Offering up a show to everyone around them as she pulled it taught, before letting it slip from her teeth with a satisfied groan. Satsuki didn't even skip a beat and by the time Ryuko had blinked, she was already headed off into the crowd. Leaving Ryuko to her first task of the night.

"Alain seems to have accepted your offer, Monsieur la Grande," Ryuko said. Purring out his last name as she took the elbow he offered up to her. Glancing down, she noted the time on her wristwatch before entering into a lengthy conversation with Francois la Grande.

Ryuko was simultaneously thankful and disgusted by the way he hung on her every word. Not to mention a few of the times she caught him hanging on a couple other things she'd be glad to exact recompense on later. Overall, the man thought himself a lady-killer. And Ryuko made sure to seem utterly wooed while also just distant enough to entice desire. By the time their conversation started to involve a bit too much in the way of provocative undertones, Ryuko checked the time again. Thankful that the next part of her mission was soon to be due.

"My, my, Monsieur." She made sure to keep eye contact with him all while plucking two stems of champagne off a waiter's tray as he passed by. Her one handed stunt earning her a quirked eyebrow from Francois at its inherent suggestiveness. "You have been such a marvelous host this evening, I do think it's time to take a drink in your honor."

Wordlessly she offered up the drink, which he took with far less grace than she possessed. Something she took as a sign that her previous endeavors had rustled his feathers in all the right ways. She let the finishing blow be a smooth hook of their drink arms together. A symbolic motion as she offered an up close opportunity typically reserved for newlyweds. She brought the glass to her lips, sipping gingerly at it before giving François a brief wink. The action gave her just enough time to untangle from him. Disappearing into the rest of the guests for the party with no rebuttal.

She made sure to slip the hotel room key she'd swiped from his trouser pockets into a secure fold of her dress. Losing herself in the crowds around them along with the barely touched glass of champagne.

Another look at her wristwatch showed Ryuko she was still on schedule. Perfect timing, in fact. So she made a beeline for the elevators, taking one all the way to the top floor. By the time she arrived, all the other guests that had been in the space with her had left. Leaving her alone upon arrival to her destination.

Thankfully, there were only two rooms on the floor and Ryuko was lucky enough to guess which suite the key was for on her first try. She glanced up and down the hallway a few times before slipping the card into the reader. Gaining access with a soft click and beep.

"Did your time with Francois la Grande go well?" Satsuki greeted her from across the room. Her figure perched just right in a windowsill as to cast her form in complete darkness. From where Ryuko stood, she could barely make out that Satsuki was no longer wearing the jacket from earlier.

"Define well," she groaned. Traversing the distance from the front door to where Satsuki sat. The moonlight illuminated the bone-white scabbard of Bakuzan as it rested against the inside

of Satsuki's knee, her hands folded in the space between her legs. Oddly neglectful of its hilt for once. "He behaved typically of a man with power. Handsy and full of himself."

Ryuko had turned to observe the massive desk that sat not five feet from where Satsuki was when she responded, "Did he hurt you at all?"

"Hurt? No." The sentiment seemed odd coming from Satsuki and Ryuko paused as she slipped a pair of gloves over her hands. "Touch my ass a coupla times? Yes."

"Mm." Was her only response and Ryuko figured that meant she could go back to snooping about the desk. Curiously running her fingers underneath the edges. "Did you happen to pack a towel in your bags?"

"Did you haul our bags up here?" Ryuko asked snidely. Aware that it would be near impossible to drag three duffle bags of equipment up to where they were on the twelfth floor. Especially if Satsuki had taken the route their mission plans detailed.

"Of course." Ryuko turned to pin Satsuki with a look of disbelief only to find her pointing off to her left. When Ryuko looked, she could see their bags sitting against the wall. Neatly arranged from smallest to largest.

"You know what?" Ryuko asked, moving from the desk to open a bag and retrieve a towel for Satsuki. "I don't want to know how you pulled that off."

"Trade secret." Despite her statement being rhetorical, Satsuki responded anyways. Ryuko would've missed the faint glimmer of amusement in her eyes if not for having handed her the crisp white towel. Watching as she took it and began to run it over her hands, the material coming away a deep scarlet.

"Shit, Satsuki," Ryuko almost moved to examine the woman before her, worried that she might've been injured but stopped half way, "that isn't yours is it?"

"No." Once she'd finished she stood from the windowsill, grasping Bakuzan in one hand as she moved to stuff the towel back into Ryuko's bag. "Had to improvise a bit when it came to the surveillance room."

"I didn't think Kiryuin Satsuki was the improvising sort."

She'd been about to turn back to the desk when she noticed Satsuki visibly stiffen beside her. Without a word, she gripped Ryuko by her bicep and shoved her away from the desk. Ryuko watched in confusion as Satsuki jammed their baggage into a nearby vanity's drawer before moving them both to the opposite side of the room. Quietly forcing them into an empty closet that was barely large enough to fit them both.

There passed an absolutely silent moment right before Ryuko had been about to open her mouth and question Satsuki's motives. But the faint sound of the suite's door unlocking made her pause. Sheer terror beginning to grip her as she realized the implications of the noise.

Their mark entered the room along with two well-dressed body guards. He seemed visibly flustered and muttered under his breath about the disappearance of his room key. Ryuko almost groaned upon hearing that but contained herself. Turning her head from staring out of the thin slats in the closet to looking up at Satsuki. Who, she noted, had been staring at her the entire time. Her sapphire eyes nearly glowing in the dark that surrounded them.

That was when Ryuko noticed just how close they *really* were. Their bodies nearly fully pressed against one another, causing every breath Ryuko took to close the gap between her breasts and Satsuki's chest. Despite that, she couldn't for the life of her break eye contact. There was something about the way she was staring at her, seemingly lost in thought, which had Ryuko wanting to swallow her own tongue. The only thing keeping her from doing so was that she feared the noise would alert their "guests".

It was then that she felt Satsuki's hand slowly grasp her own. Bringing it ever so carefully upwards until she pressed Ryuko's digits into the soft spot just below her jaw line. Beneath her fingertips, Ryuko could feel Satsuki's heartbeat hammering in her veins. Pace at a mile a minute. Something that Ryuko would never had known was the case from just observing her. She realized then the implications of Satsuki's actions as she brought her other hand to her face. Laying her forefinger against her lips as a sign to Ryuko for her to stay quiet. All she could do was nod slightly and continue to keep her gaze locked with Satsuki's. The action in particular no longer intimidating as much as it was comforting.

Fifteen minutes passed before their mark did anything besides sit at the desk and complain to his subordinates. Their patience had paid off, though, as he ordered them out of the room. Not moving until they had done so. When they were gone, Ryuko observed as Satsuki tilted her head to the side. Watching attentively at the scene before her as the mark felt around underneath the desk. There was a soft clicking noise and then with some effort he produced a small box from where his hands had been working.

Just seeing the object seemed to relieve him and he put it back before standing from the desk and beginning to make his way towards the door. As soon as he had passed by the closet, Satsuki stealthily slipped from the space and crept up behind him. Ryuko watched on in amazement as she delivered a swift and powerful chop to the base of his skull. The action rendering him completely unconscious, and allowing Satsuki to scoop his limp frame up onto her shoulder before he even hit the ground.

"Grab the bags and that box and meet me on the roof," she whispered while passing by Ryuko. She'd been about to question where Satsuki planned on going with him only to be left speechless when she merely stepped out of the window. Completely disappearing as she began to climb the sheer face of the hotel building with Bakuzan strapped to one side and their mark draped across her arm.

"Well then," Ryuko mused, all while wrenching their bags from the vanity drawer. It took her a moment to understand the mechanics of the desk but after a minute of feeling around she pulled the box free from its confines. Jamming it into one of the bags and heading towards the exit, "That explains that."

Even with her arms laden full with baggage, the guards outside of the door were easy enough to pass by. All Ryuko had to do was make it seem like she'd been there the whole time. She

even went the extra mile by mussing up her hair and smearing her lipstick. And leaving with a shy air had been all she needed to keep them from asking questions. After all, you never ask about a boss's extracurricular activities lest you wanted to be jobless.

With that done, getting to the roof proved to be simple. Down the hall from the room was a maintenance access to the stairwell. One flight up and she was kicking the door out to the sight of an entire city laid before her. If it hadn't been for the nature of what was about to go down, she might've enjoyed the view a bit more.

But Satsuki was already there. Their mark kneeling before her, still unconscious. The only reason he hadn't fallen forward was because she had her hand fisted into his hair. Keeping him steady.

Once Ryuko had gotten close enough and dropped their bags, Satsuki pulled a slim vial from her back pocket. She snapped it in half between her thumb and forefinger before waving it under Francois' nose. As soon as he inhaled, he was awake. Terrified and gasping for air.

"Speak and you die," she hissed before looking up at Ryuko and nodding towards the bags. "The box."

She did as she was told and retrieved the elegant little thing from her bag before moving into their marks line of sight. He reeled in shock when he laid his eyes on her and Ryuko made sure to grin menacingly as she passed. Offering Satsuki the box as she released Francois' hair to take it. Unconcerned about him attempting to escape.

"Explain how to open it." Satsuki had flicked the container open and pulled out what Ryuko could see was a pysanka. Except, unlike its typically colorful brethren, this one was adorned much the same way Satsuki typically was. All silver with golden accents etched into its shell. She thrust it out to him but Francois didn't budge. He just continued to flick his gaze from it to Satsuki and back.

"You want me to rough him up a bit?" Ryuko asked, all while cracking her knuckles. She was absolutely dying to get a few swings in before he... expired.

"Mmm no," her response disappointed Ryuko but the brief flash of a terrifying grin kept her hopes up. "Tell me, Francois la Grande. Has the myth of the shogun's decapitator reached your ears yet?"

He shook his head fervently. Tears starting to stream down his face when he glanced up at Ryuko and saw her face split in a sickening smile.

"It started a few years back. Every once in a while you still see news articles about the vicious decapitations that seem to be happening at random. All featuring the same decapitator handle." Satsuki took a step out from behind him as she spoke. All while un-harnessing Bakuzan from her side and offering it out to where Ryuko stood. "Let me introduce you to her right now."

Ryuko waved her hand slightly. Utterly amused by Satsuki's antics.

“Now. Show me how to open this, or she can open you on my behalf.” She offered him the egg one more time and even had the capacity to seem thrilled when he took it from her. He positioned his fingers at seemingly random intervals on the shell and before their eyes it cracked open, revealing an inner compartment.

Satsuki reached out and took it from him then, a small smile gracing her lips as she continued to hold her katana out. “Ryuko.”

“Yes, Satsuki-sama?” she asked in a sickeningly sweet manner.

“I would be honored if you used Bakuzan.”

“Honor’s all mine.” She reached out and took the worn leather grip of Bakuzan into her palm. With the gentlest of tugs, she wrested the blade from its scabbard. Brandishing it with the artful air of a master.

And nothing in that moment was more satisfying than when she severed Monsieur Francois la Grande’s head from his neck. Delighting in the way Bakuzan seemed to sing with approval as she did so.

Five hectic minutes later and they were squealing away in a Porsche convertible they’d had planted on the site for their getaway. With Satsuki in the driver’s seat it didn’t take long for them to get out of the city and Ryuko was wholly impressed that they never once garnered the attention of any police. Surprising, considering Satsuki was driving a fair amount over the speed limit.

After being on the road for some time they finally come to a stop at a red light on the outskirts of town. And as Ryuko finished up looking behind them to make sure there was no one tailing them, what truly shocked her was the sound of laughter. In disbelief she looked over to find Satsuki slumped over the steering wheel, her palm slapping the dash as she continued to overflow in giggles and snorts.

“Muu, Satsuki,” the sound of her chuckling was so new and foreign to Ryuko that she wasn’t certain how to take it, “you okay?”

“Aah, hah,” she nodded and straightened her back out, smiling over at Ryuko in a way that left her stunned. “Yes. Tonight was a treat.”

“Mmm.” Ryuko hummed in agreeance. Continuing to watch Satsuki until their eyes locked. The air in the car shifted then, and the grins that had been on both of their faces slowly started to melt away. Ryuko could swear that the space between them was shrinking more, and more...

Then they were kissing. Just like they had been on the ballroom floor. Except, it wasn’t a ploy. Not something bred from a mission role-play but from their own rampant appetites for one another. Ryuko could swear she was drowning, tossing and turning in the static hum that was boiling in her head. And the only anchor around was Satsuki. The painful smashing of their lips together, clacking of teeth, fingernails on necks- then a car was honking behind them. The light having turned green God knows how long ago.

They pulled away from each other a little too quickly. Their breathing still laborious from what had just happened. Satsuki put a lead foot to the accelerator and they shot off, leaving the car that had been behind them in the dust.

The rest of their drive was filled with a bizarre awkwardness. In the background, the radio hummed out as many songs as it could to pass the time. Ryuko was thankful when they got back to the mansion and didn't speak a word to one another as they parted ways for the night. Some things didn't need to be beaten senseless with hollow-sounding "good nights".

Immediately upon entering her room, Ryuko dropped her bags and made a beeline for the bathroom. She was exhausted, and after exiting the scalding hot shower she was bemused to find that a few rays of sunshine were already heralding the arrival of dawn. She'd been about to flop into her bed when a few raps resounded on her door. No doubt it was Soroi bringing her an early breakfast and Ryuko suddenly realized how hungry she had been as she moved to answer the door.

"Man, Soroi, am I happ-" she never got to finish her sentence as Satsuki pushed her way into the room. Ryuko watched as it took Satsuki only nanoseconds to close the door, flip the lock, and grab her by the front of her tank top and neck. Their lips connecting in between hectic backwards steps.

"Do- mm- do you want me to stop?" Satsuki breathed out in the moments when they weren't forcing their mouths together. Ryuko shook her head in response, her tongue too busy shoving itself into the space between Satsuki's lips.

"No, please God, no, don't stop."

At Ryuko's words, Satsuki responded by hefting her up. Hands cupping her ass and squeezing roughly before depositing her abruptly on the bed. For all of the two seconds Satsuki took to admire Ryuko sprawled out before her, Ryuko got a generous view of her own. And she made sure to rake her gaze painfully slow over the barely tied robe she'd shown up in before being enveloped.

Ryuko was pleased to find out that Satsuki was hardly a gentle lover. On the contrary, the first thing she did when she knelt over Ryuko's prone form was bury her teeth into the soft of Ryuko's left shoulder. Eliciting a shocked gasp that was rapidly followed by Ryuko burying her fingers in Satsuki's hair. Taking a brief moment to admire its silky texture before wrenching on it. The sound of Satsuki growling low vibrated in Ryuko's ears and between her legs she could already begin to feel the pounding sensation of unbridled arousal.

Their lips found each other again in a mix of teeth and tongue after Satsuki left a sizeable bruise on Ryuko's skin. She could feel Satsuki's hands gradually moving further down her torso. Suspiciously light fingertips barely grazing against the parts of Ryuko's skin that were exposed to the world. The action left Ryuko mewling into Satsuki's mouth in impatience, her own fingers untangling themselves from Satsuki's locks to grab at her hands. Forcing one between her legs and the other against one of her breasts.

"So impatient." After positioning Satsuki's hands for her, Ryuko busied herself with running her palms down the smooth plane of Satsuki's back. Her fingernails digging in mercilessly as

she pulled them back up to her shoulders.

"God, now you want to talk?" she would've complained further if one of Satsuki's digits hadn't managed to peel her underwear away from her sopping core. The very tip of it teasingly tracing circles around the sensitive bud that Ryuko was dying to have touched.

The tormenting lasted a short amount of time. Ending as Satsuki pressed her palm completely flush to Ryuko's heat. She instinctively began to rut her hips against it, desperately wanting as much friction as she could possibly get against her throbbing clitoris. Hardly caring that Satsuki snickered softly at her antics, her other hand busying itself with pushing up Ryuko's tank top. Revealing her breasts so that she could clamp her mouth onto one of the pert nipples she found there.

Ryuko may have lasted longer if it had been any other partner in her bed. But just the fact that it was Kiryuin Satsuki, and not some bargain bin one night stand, was enough to have Ryuko knocking on her orgasms door. A proverbial girl scout hoping to sell all of her cookies in one stop.

So it didn't surprise her that the instant she felt one of Satsuki's incredibly long, and incredibly dexterous, fingers slide inside of her that she lost complete control. The sensation so damn good her thighs were shaking and all she could see was a red haze. All she cared about was the euphoric sensation that came to pass as she felt her muscles uncoil and give in to it.

When she came to, Satsuki was hunched over her. Leaving butterfly kisses languorously down the divot in her abdomen. Seemingly completely unaware that Ryuko had regained consciousness at all. So she took the opportunity while she could, willing the last vestiges of strength that still remained in her limbs to grab Satsuki by the collar of her robe and throw her to the mattress. Clambering on top of her and sitting with pride across the cradle of Satsuki's hips.

The only response she got for her effort was a curiously raised eyebrow and partially quirked lips. Ryuko just rolled her eyes, fingernails finding purchase across the thin skin above Satsuki's clavicle. An action that was rewarded with the faintest hiss from Satsuki's lips and the errant buck of her hips against Ryuko core.

She could have taken her time with the whole thing, but Ryuko had been feeling impatient even before their mission started and it had never quite faded away. So instead of removing the robe entirely she just merely untied it, nudging both sides open so that she could lean forward and admire the breasts she'd only ever been able to imagine before then. Cupping them both in palms just a little too small to completely contain their girth.

Satsuki offered up a soft sigh at the act, drawing Ryuko's thoughts back to the entire picture at hand. Even if she was seated in a particularly powerful position, there was absolutely nothing controlling about it. The woman laid out before her was, in every sense of the word, strength personified. It showed in every movement of her limbs, every little twitch of sinuous muscle concealed beneath snow white skin. Ryuko was certain that if Satsuki wanted the seat of power in their situation, she could take it easily. And Ryuko wasn't certain whether she would be willing to fight for it, regardless.

"Seems unfair that you can tease while I was spurred into action." They locked eyes and Ryuko grinned before shimmying down. Placing herself in the space between Satsuki's thighs.

"Just try not to crush my head when yah come, alright?" she joked. Though once she'd positioned herself there, with Satsuki's muscled legs straddling her skull, there passed a moment when she realized it wasn't entirely a joke. She tried not to admit that the additional danger of it didn't leave her a bit more aroused.

The sight she was greeted with did little to keep her desire from burning raging hot again, either. Satsuki's center was already glistening with arousal, and as Ryuko leaned forward to slip her tongue into those folds, she made sure to slide her palms up and down the length of her firm stomach. Relishing in the way Satsuki arched against her as she lapped at her heat. Always ending broad strokes with a flick to Satsuki's swollen clitoris.

Ryuko hadn't expected Satsuki to be audible at all, so the meek sighs and occasional whines she elicited were nothing short of mini accomplishments. Little gold stars pinned to Ryuko's pride with every writhe and curl of her fingers into the sheets and her hair.

The entire encounter was absolutely satisfying. From the brief eye contact they would make to the way Satsuki's taste seemed to blend into everything. Even if she never managed to enter her before her climax, Ryuko was certain she could die happy with what she got. Nothing compared to bringing Satsuki to her peak of pleasure. And she made sure to bask in it, watching on in awe when Satsuki bucked beneath her. Coming unbound in a single moment.

After the fact, she cleaned her chin and cheeks with her thumbs and tongue before settling beside a huffing Satsuki. It had been the only time Ryuko had seen her any degree of worn out before. So she merely turned on her side and pressed her back to where Satsuki laid. Patiently waiting for her to recover from her afterglow.

"So..." Ryuko started as Satsuki turned to face her, her arms snaking around Ryuko's frame. "What was inside that egg, anyways?"

"Mmm," the familiar hum was somehow more comforting with Satsuki as close as she was, "something that Mother will be pleased to know was retrieved successfully."

"Always so vague." Reaching back, Ryuko ruffled at the fringe of Satsuki's bangs blindly.

"Your hard work tonight was highly appreciated. But..." it should've been worrying to hear that coming from Satsuki but Ryuko was too content to care, warmed by the few rays of sunlight filtering in through the window and the woman behind her. "Could you do me a favor from now on?"

"Mnn, what's that?" Ryuko could feel her consciousness slowly slipping away. Exhaustion taking complete hold of her after all the events that had unfolded.

She could feel Satsuki's lips against the shell of her ear before she got a response. "Stop getting hurt on your missions, Matoi. I imagine you can find more... creative ways to get my

attention from now on."

All Ryuko could manage at that point was a single 'hah' before closing her eyes. Her fingertips clumsily gathering Satsuki's hand into her own before she drifted off into a bout of much needed sleep.

Boiling Point

CHAPTER 5: Boiling Point

Ryuko almost wished it had been more difficult to find Inumuta Houka. But as was the case with most people of power, they often preferred to show themselves off. There was something about the mindset that could leave one feeling immortal. A particular trait that Ryuko had learned, over so many years, to abuse to her fullest ability.

Inumuta would be the same as the rest.

After Tsumugu had forged the blade for her, the brethren kin to the one she'd wielded years ago, Ryuko had gotten on a plane and made a one-way beeline for Tokyo. Never skipping a beat as she nicked a bike from a passer-by and sped off into the city. Not even slightly concerned about being caught.

Information had pointed her to a particular club, and as she pulled in, it seemed horrendously unassuming from the outside. She'd been about to drive away, fuming about how her sources had lied to her, only to watch as a sleek limousine pulled up to the front.

A familiar stocky form, complete with the same dreaded black hair, of Hoomaru Rei appeared from the driver's side. Only to loop back down the car to open one of the back doors. Four full-suited individuals exited the vehicle and Ryuko held her breath as it took a particularly long portion of time for the next to come, letting it out of her mouth in a growl. Her eyes focusing on the form of a man dressed in a superbly crafted kimono and even if she felt he'd grown a bit more effeminate over the years, she knew it was still Inumuta.

But the victory of knowing she'd found him was short lived as Ryuko witnessed another form slide casually from the back of the limo. The twin blonde pigtails and obnoxiously bright-pink dress left her stomach feeling as if she'd eaten a handful of rocks.

Why is Nui here? she wondered. Swallowing hard even as she shut the bike off and began to make her way towards the club.

Ryuko had left the motorcycle helmet she'd also stolen firmly on her head as she entered. Not even being questioned by the staff as they were too busy attending to every whim of the Yakuza boss that had graced their establishment. On the inside, Ryuko noted, the club was actually just the sort of place she'd expect Inumuta to enjoy. All decked in a sort of retro grade hacker-tech feel from the music to the almost circuit board-esque wall art. Even the bathrooms had toilets that pulsed a faint blue in time with the bass that throbbed through the core of everything in the joint.

It was about the time Ryuko was finishing up removing the clothing she'd stolen over the course of the evening when someone else made their way into the bathroom. She wouldn't even had paid it any mind if it hadn't been for the cellphone ringer that went off. It's very jingle eliciting some particularly turbulent memories of a church and the sound of gun fire.

“Well, hey there, Hoomaru,” Ryuko hummed. All while sidling up behind where Hoomaru stood at a mirror. The small form of Ryuko’s new scissor blade coming to a rest right across the line of her neck. She plucked the cell phone from Hoomaru’s palm with her free hand and pressed the end button on it. Checking the caller id briefly to make sure it hadn’t been someone of importance.

“R-Ryuko?” Hoomaru had the tact to seem flustered as she made eye contact with Ryuko through the mirror.

“I would ask how my family’s doing but,” Ryuko started moving them towards the exit of the bathroom. All while continuing to keep a firm hold on the back of Hoomaru’s shoulder. “I really have better things to worry about at the moment.”

It never ceased to amaze Ryuko how people could dismiss even the wildest of things without bringing any sort of attention to it. Like how she essentially had Hoomaru at knife point as multiple patrons walked past them. Fully noticing the situation at hand but continuing on their own path, regardless. Maybe it had something to do with a Yakuza boss being in their midst, or maybe it had something to do with the way Ryuko kept a completely calm look on her face. Even when, beneath her fingertips, she could feel Hoomaru beginning to boil over with fear.

“INUMUTA HOUKA!” Ryuko bellowed. Capturing the full attention of everyone on the dance floor she stood at the back of, along with many of the people who were on the balcony above it. “YOU AND I HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS!”

Everything went nearly silent for an eerily long portion of time. Ryuko almost went to yell again before the sliding paper doors on the second floor shuffled open, revealing the four guards from earlier. Their hands occupied with katanas. Behind them, Ryuko could see the form of Inumuta and Nui making their way towards the bannister. Their eyes focused on Ryuko in their own sets of emotions. Delighted and annoyed.

Once Ryuko knew she had a captive audience, she took a slight step back from Hoomaru. Flicking the blade in her hands ever so slightly, Ryuko caused it to elongate and snap into place as a full length sword before swinging it down in a crescent shape. Detaching Hoomaru’s left arm from her body in a single, clean, slice.

It was as Hoomaru was writhing around on the ground, screaming in agony, that Inumuta finally chose to speak. “Shut up, Rei! Statistically speaking, she could’ve done a whole lot worse to you. After all, they called her the shogun’s decapitator for years because that’s what she was most known for.”

His berating fell on deaf ears as Hoomaru continued to howl at the top of her lungs. “Hey, Inumuta.” Ryuko spoke over it as she flicked her wrist to dislodge some of the blood from her blade.

“Ryuko,” he addressed her while pushing the wire frame glasses on his nose back into place.

“Nice kimono yah got there,” she sneered. Observing that the ocean blue garment had the visage of a sea serpent coiling around it. “Did yer boyfriend make that for yah?”

“Leave Iori out of this, Matoi,” he warned. His right hand coming to rest on the grip of his own katana in some sort of show of power. Ryuko just grinned wickedly up at him.

“Oh, I’m gonna involve Iori. Right after I get done with you.”

It was then that he barked a short order at the guards he had arrived with, commanding them to attack her. Ryuko frowned as they leapt towards her, not even caring to take the stairs that were hardly even twenty feet from them. Once they’d landed, they all engaged her at the same moment and for the first time since Ryuko had woken from her coma, she was swinging a blade with deadly purpose. The action a bittersweet reminder that her limbs, for years, had belonged to the sensation of ripping through skin, muscle, and bone.

She imagined from a spectator's seat, everything moved too fast to tell what happened. But in the moment, she knew where every single slice had been placed and how she had dodged every one of their horrendously swung katanas. As the battle came to a grinding halt, she poised her hand above the grip to the scissor blade. Striking it once with her palm as their bodies gave out in unison. A mocking gesture to Inumuta of a move Satsuki had always been fond of showing off.

“I would’ve thought being in a coma for four years would’ve slowed an old dog like you down, Matoi,” he quipped. All while retrieving a brick-sized PDA from his kimono and beginning to plug away at the keys on it.

“Ain’t that old, yah asshole.” It was then that Nui began to bounce excitedly in her spot, her hands occupied with a length of chain attached to a spiked ball. With every movement she made, Ryuko could swear it was about to hit her.

“Ooooo, is it my turn now?!” she didn’t even wait for Inumuta to reply. Instead, she vaulted the bannister and came to land with unnatural finesse before Ryuko. Her one eye barely visible from the way she smiled; her cheek nearly touching her eyebrow because of it.

“Say, Inumuta,” Ryuko spoke as she entered a low stance, the scissor blade held above her in a defensive manner. “I never pinned you for the type to take help from Mother.”

“Oh, he didn’t!” She had begun to swing the ball in wide-arching circles. Each time it passed, Ryuko could swear it was getting closer. “Momma sent me after she heard you’d woken up.”

“And I wonder where she heard that from?” Ryuko growled. Wary of the way Nui seemingly had no care to engage her. “I was going to save the two of you for last but killing you now seems like a sweeter deal.”

“Oh, now now, Ryuko!” Before she could react, Nui kicked the ball out of its course. Sending it hurling towards Ryuko with so much force that when it connected with her chest, she could swear she heard a few of her ribs crack. The blow sent her reeling to the floor and when she went to take a breath, all she could do was cough. At the back of her throat Ryuko could begin to taste a faint metallic tang. “You should be nicer to your sister!”

Nui didn’t wait for Ryuko to respond and instead followed up with a downward swing of her weapon. Fast reflexes saved Ryuko from having it buried in her skull as she rolled out of the

way. Somehow managing to spin back to her feet even though every breath she took felt like it would be her last.

Through the pain, though, she somehow managed to regain her senses. She watched as Nui kicked the ball out again, but instead of being dumb-founded at the move, Ryuko quickly side-stepped. Gripping her scissor blade like a baseball bat and pretending she was going for a home run swing. The flat of her sword connected with a harsh *CLANG* as it was sent flying back at Nui. The entirety of the situation caught her off guard as the metal orb connected with her forehead, causing a pointed cracking noise.

Unfortunately for Ryuko, the hit didn't even seem to faze her. In fact, Nui just continued to smile. So sickening in its continuity it was beginning to drive Ryuko mad. She could even start to feel the telltale signs of rage ebbing beneath the skin in her forearms and the back of her neck.

"Matoi! Your feet!" Inumuta called to Ryuko from above. Looking down, she noticed that the chain was coiled up around her feet precariously. She hopped slightly, just barely missing having her feet pulled out from under her as Nui yanked the line.

"Helping the enemy now, dog?" Nui hissed at him through clenched teeth as she began to swing the ball in broad strokes, attempting to catch Ryuko with each of its passes.

"Use your blade, Ryuko!" she only wondered for a brief second why Inumuta was helping her. Though, ultimately, she was far more preoccupied with trying to stop Nui at all costs. So she started to weave her way through the trajectory of the ball. Calculating how every finite gesture of Nui's arms would affect its course before finally getting close enough to strike out at her. Catching Nui somewhat off guard and cutting a single clean line right across her abdomen.

Her distress at Ryuko's successful attack didn't come immediately. First, she let her weapon drop to the floor. Slipping from her fingertips like loose sand as it puddled around her feet. Then Nui started *howling* in a mix of what Ryuko could only guess was severe anger and pain. She clutched at the lengthy slice in her midriff, her fingers attempting to close it back together.

Though what really haunted Ryuko about that moment was that there was no blood pouring from the wound like there should've been. Instead, it looked like Nui was a ragdoll. Held together with fibrous sinews that Ryuko had managed to snip apart. Even as she began to backpedal away from Ryuko, her hands still fumbling to squash herself back together. It appeared to Ryuko that the wound was seemingly stitching itself back together. Albeit, at an incredibly slow pace.

"Y-you!" Nui looked up, her one good eye pinning Ryuko with a venomous glare that rivalled some of the stink eyes she'd been shot with by Jakuzure herself. "I-I'll kill you! I'll f-f-fucking kill you the n-next time I see you!"

Then she was gone. No explanation, just thin air.

“I didn’t want to believe it when I saw you, but that really is a Tsumugu sword, isn’t it?” Ryuko nearly pissed herself when she heard Inumuta’s voice right beside her. Jumping slightly before settling back down into a guarded stance, her scissor blade aimed suspiciously at him.

“It is,” she responded. Watching as Inumuta hummed in understanding before pushing his glasses back up his nose.

“Thank you for getting rid of Nui and,” he glanced behind her before continuing, “putting Hoomaru at a significant disadvantage.”

“I didn’t do that for you, dog.” They stared at each other then, though all Ryuko could focus on were the soft whimpers of protest coming from Hoomaru.

“Still,” he looked away, glancing back at the PDA in his palm before typing at the keyboard fervently. “You’re here because you think I know where Satsuki-sama is, correct?”

“Well, I was going to wring the information out of you before I killed yah, yea.” The blade was growing heavy in her hands and the muscles in her shoulders and arms were beginning to burn in protest.

“I refuse to fight you, Matoi.”

“Then at least tell me where Satsuki is before I make quick work of you,” she threatened. Standing upright and resting her blade against the side of Inumuta’s neck. Through the fringe of his light blue bangs, she could swear she saw defeat in his eyes.

“Of all the information I have, that is something I lack,” he looked up to catch her gaze again. “Though, I do know where Sanageyama is. And where Sanageyama is-”

“Nonon isn’t far off,” she sighed. Still poised to take his head even as he continued on.

“Sanageyama is staying in a RV trailer not thirty miles from El Paso, I’ll even give you the coordinates.” He dug around again in the folds of his kimono before retrieving a pen and a small pad of paper. After a moment, he had scrawled the coordinates onto a piece and ripped it from the rest, offering it out to Ryuko at arm’s length.

It was a standoff, then. Ryuko took the paper and jammed it into her jacket before poisoning herself at the ready again. “How’s that boyfriend of yours doin’? Still making clothes?”

“It is his passion, after all.”

“I did always prefer him out of the bunch.”

“As did I.”

Ryuko saw his eyes soften and could tell where his thoughts were at. Suddenly it seemed like a damn shame to rid the world of a pair of people who were so terribly in love. So she lowered her blade, shrunk it back down, and shoved it back into its tiny holster on her hip before preoccupying herself with an incredibly pale Hoomaru.

“Good luck, Ryuko. I’m sure we’ll be seeing each other again very soon.”

She flipped him off for the comment as she knelt down and tossed Hoomaru over her shoulder. Carrying her outside and around the back of the building where Ryuko found a suitable car to hijack. Packaging Hoomaru snugly into the trunk so as not to draw any attention on the way to their destination.

“I’m letting you live, Hoomaru,” Ryuko groaned as she opened the trunk, greeting herself with the sight of a wide-eyed and terrified look. “Yah wanna know why?”

There was no response from Hoomaru and Ryuko just shrugged.

“Because I want you to go back to Mother and let her know what happened tonight, let her know what I did to Nui, and let her know that I intend to do the same thing to her,” she leaned down and roughly gripped Hoomaru by the front of her suit; the fabric matted with blood. “I want her to know that she isn’t going to be getting away with any of her shit. She won’t be standing in my way when it comes to Satsuki, do you hear me?”

And with that, Ryuko threw her from the trunk. Rolling her down a snowy embankment to where she continued to flop all the way to a hospital entrance before jumping back into the driver’s seat. Escaping into the night towards her next objective.

Six years earlier.

Being called to Satsuki’s office was something akin to being called in to see the principal at school. Except, the difference between the principal and Satsuki was that with Satsuki, it was always bad news. Whether it seemed like good news then or not.

This time when Ryuko entered the space, Satsuki wasn’t standing and waiting for her. She was firmly seated behind her desk. Her “throne” swiveled so that all Ryuko could see was the faintest hint of her nose in profile as her arm extended out towards the desk. Slender fingertips pinching an all too familiar style of a crisp, white, envelope. Even at distance, Ryuko could hear the faint tip, tip, tip, as she tapped it against the wooden surface.

“Mother has called for you,” she spoke abruptly. Her tone low and dark even as she turned to face Ryuko. Her features set with eyebrows skewed slightly together and lips completely turned down at the edges.

“Did I do something wrong?” Ryuko closed the space between them with calculated footfalls. Bypassing the table all together so that she was standing in front of Satsuki, their knees nearly knocking against each other.

“Even by my standards, you have done nothing wrong,” she spoke softly as she stood, offering up the envelope for Ryuko to take. “This makes no sense. Even by Mother’s standards.”

Ryuko took the envelope and jammed into an inner pocket of her jacket. Looking up at Satsuki for confirmation of anything in her eyes, only to find a tumultuous storm brewing in their sapphire depths.

“There’s a chopper on the roof waiting for you,” she spoke in a subdued whisper, waiting for Ryuko to lean forward slightly before pressing a gentle kiss to her lips. “Be careful.”

“Don’t worry about me so much, Sats.” Ryuko leaned forward again, capturing a more heated kiss before taking a step back with a grin.

“I have too. Especially when your tongue is so set to provoke,” she smiled then, only slightly, before taking a step forward to press a final peck on the end of Ryuko’s nose. “Remember what we talked about.”

“Yea. I’ll be back,” Ryuko responded before bowing playfully and exiting Satsuki’s office.

The helicopter had its blades spinning even before Ryuko had gotten to the roof. She hopped through one of the open side doors and closed it firmly behind her as it promptly lifted from the ground. Carrying them up into the air before veering off to a destination somewhere south of the mansion.

Now, Satsuki’s mansion had always been a sight to behold for Ryuko. It was monolithic in comparison to most of the buildings she’d seen in Japan, let alone been allowed to step foot in. On top of that, it was just absolutely *filled* with stuff. Paintings, rugs, vases... hell, Ryuko had even seen a few stuffed lions in the oddest places. But if Ryuko considered Satsuki’s mansion a show of money, the Kiryuin manor was a *castle*. Complete with parapets and moat. Something Ryuko was shocked to find wasn’t even an exaggeration.

So if she hadn’t been intimidated before, Ryuko was definitely intimidated when she laid her eyes on it. Even more so when she finally exited the chopper. Walking across a roof obviously specifically designed for drop offs of this sort. Though lacking in any sort of guardrail system. Something that Ryuko felt nervous about despite the six foot wide berth she had on either side.

At the end of the walkway was a familiar figure. One that Ryuko had only seen a handful of times and never truly spoken with before. Hoomaru Rei greeted Ryuko then with a lengthy and cordial bow. Raising herself back up after a few seconds, only to punctuate her greeting by scrawling a note across the clipboard stuffed with paper. An object she constantly kept tucked into the crook of her elbow.

“Matoi Ryuko. Kiryuin Ragyo-sama would like to see you.”

She’d been about to give a snarky reply when Hoomaru abruptly turned, leading the way into a dark hall. Ryuko had to jog slightly to keep up with her pace. Feeling only slightly uneasy by the low visibility of the building they were entering. The only sources of light being dim wall sconces that came every thirty feet.

It felt like they’d been walking forever through a never-ending hallway until Ryuko caught sight of a proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. It poured out from a room that was coming

up on their right in all sorts of magnificent hues. All Ryuko could liken it too was that of a rainbow.

“Kiryuin-sama. Matoi Ryuko has arrived,” Hoomaru announced Ryuko’s entrance before she’d even rounded the corner into the room.

When she did Ryuko found herself speechless. The hairs on the back of her neck prickling at the sight of an inhumanly tall woman radiating the same light Ryuko had seen from the hallway. She just seemed to... *shine* and the eerie prospect of that left Ryuko with a terrible gut feeling. Suddenly she understood why Satsuki was always so full of resolve, always so guarded and shut.

Kiryuin Ragyo turned to face Ryuko then. Her movements impossibly slow and filled with sensual grace. Even her fingertips followed her arms like the flow of a river. One portion seamlessly after another.

“So this is the notorious Matoi Ryuko I’ve heard so much about.”

As she spoke, Ryuko bowed. The action done more out of nervousness than anything else. When she went to straighten her back she nearly gasped. Nothing had signaled that Kiryuin Ragyo had moved at all but there she was. Not a scant two inches from where Ryuko stood. Her eyes uncomfortably at the other’s woman breast level.

“Oh?” she purred and Ryuko had to steel her nerves as Ragyo reached out, taking the bundle of errant red hair that consistently grew from Ryuko’s scalp between her fingertips. “My, my, my. It would seem that my little Satsuki has been keeping such a wonderful treat from me.”

“M-ma’am?” Ryuko questioned. Her skin beginning to tingle with a crawling sensation as she could feel the bizarre sensitivity of those particular hairs spring to life in Ragyo’s grasp.

“Tell me, child, has Satsuki spoken to you of life fibers yet?”

Ryuko could feel her blood run cold at the accusation and she attempted to feign confusion. Pressing back on the memory of Satsuki’s brief warning before her departure. “N-no?”

“Too bad. Seems she has felt the need to keep you in the dark about something that would truly unlock all of your potential,” she cooed and Ryuko sighed in relief as she finally released her hair. “Let me enlighten you, my daughter.”

Ragyo had already begun to move across the room. Towards an alcove that Ryuko hadn’t noticed at first upon entry into the space. There was something burdensome about the air in the space and Ryuko couldn’t shake the feeling of her thoughts being sluggish. Her muscles too relaxed for a situation that she would typically be antsy in. *Did she say daughter? Does she think I’m Satsuki?* “I think you’ve mistaken me for Satsuki-sama, Kiryuin-sama.”

“On the contrary,” she held up a slip of paper for Ryuko to take and against her will her feet began to move. Legs like a fresh-born doe, feeble and wobbly, even as she arrived at her destination. Receiving the photo in hand so she could observe it. Noting a young man and woman. Both of whom Ryuko could identify as her father and the woman standing in front of

her. “You are the child that I had thought was dead. The missing fruit of my loins that was stolen away from me by Matoi Isshin: your father.”

There was no room for words in Ryuko’s mouth or mind. How could it be possible? Her father had never once spoken of Kiryuin Ragyo. Had never explained anything of her mother. “I don’t believe you.”

Ryuko’s blunt statement was met with a particularly sinister chortle from Ragyo as she tipped her head back in amusement. “Come now, child. How else could you have a lock of life fibers growing from you if not for me?”

That red streak, so familiar since Ryuko’s childhood, she could never seem to rid herself of it. No dye ever stuck, and cutting it back did nothing but cause her physical and mental pain. But there was no way that could be true. Satsuki had told her that life fibers could only be worn. Satsuki had said life fibers couldn’t interface with a human in any other way-

“My dear little Satsuki must have been keeping a close eye on you because of it. Making sure you wouldn’t cause her anymore... *trouble*.”

Tears were starting to burn at the corners of Ryuko’s eyes as her mind swam with thoughts. Terrible accusations. Why hadn’t Satsuki ever brought it up? Why didn’t she at least tell Ryuko she might think that there were life fibers growing from her? Living inside her. The very thought left her feeling exposed. Stomach flopping in sickening somersaults at the prospect that there were alien *things* inside of her.

“Though, I suppose that’s what you get when you’re ignorant of what a higher life form can do for us pathetic humans,” Ragyo’s words were starting to be drowned out by Ryuko’s own torrent of mind-numbing thoughts. She could feel a slim, chilling, finger brush along the edges of her jaw. The line of her lips. Ryuko wanted to run, wanted to flee that place but was bound to the spot. Eyes suddenly angled up to gaze into Ragyo’s own iron-toned ones. “You are the future, Ryuko. A human, life fiber, hybrid. Welcome home.”

“I-” Ryuko never finished her sentence, to at a loss for words. So she did the only thing that she could do.

She ran.

Nui was quick to enter the scene as soon as Ryuko had left. The only thing heralding her appearance being the upbeat hum of whatever tune she had invented moments before. Ragyo had continued to leave her eyes glued to the doorway Ryuko had escaped through. Nui did nothing but continue to hum until Ragyo turned to her.

“Go be mommy’s dearest and make sure your long lost sister doesn’t cause any trouble.”

“Oooh, sounds like fun!” then Nui was gone and Ragyo was laughing.

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